MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY Magazine

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Issue #38

"Bisclavret"
by India Edghill

Grandeur & Romance:
Interview with
Lawrence Watt-Evans

"Whistle the Wind"
by Cynthia McQuillin

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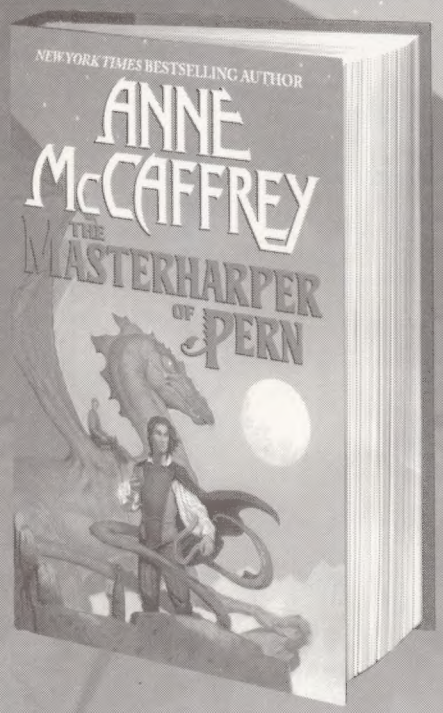

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EDITORIAL

Once my career reached the point where publishers believed that my name on the cover would sell books even if they weren't mine, I started getting manuscripts or page proofs accompanied by requests to say something nice that could be used to help publicize these books. At first I got books by people I knew, frequently books where I had provided criticism and feedback during the writing process and told the author to have her editor send them to me. Then I started getting books I wasn't expecting, and just figured it was the price of fame.

After the publication of **MISTS OF AVALON**, my fame became a good deal greater, and peoples' ideas of what I might like and/or be willing to promote became greatly more diverse, especially when some people got the mistaken notion that I was a Pagan High Priestess or something similar.

I remember the first time I really agonized over whether to provide a quote for a book. It was produced by a publishing house I dealt with frequently, and the editor, for whom I had great respect, was terrifically enthusiastic about it, but I just didn't like it. I was debating with myself whether to say something nice about it anyway, and my secretary, who was listening to this debate, said, "No, don't. If you start saying that you like books you really don't like, then your recommendations won't be worth anything." I realized that she had a point.

Readers buy books by new authors with cover blurbs from authors they like because they think that if an author whose work they like enjoyed this book, they probably will too. If an author provides blurbs for other reasons: friendship with the editor, a desire to keep on the Marketing Department's good side, wanting to do a favor for a friend (and I was once sent a book by a friend where my reaction to it was "embarrassingly bad"); then that author is no longer providing an accurate reflection of her tastes.

It's like being an editor; you buy the stories you like because you expect your readers to like them too. I have heard "a collection of prejudices" given as the definition for "editor" and there's a lot of truth to that. Every editor has prejudices, things he or she likes or doesn't like, and these determine the stories they buy. A successful editor is one who has lots of readers whose prejudices are similar enough so that they want to read the stories the editor chooses. I hope I'm lucky enough to have readers like that.

Marion Zimmer Bradley

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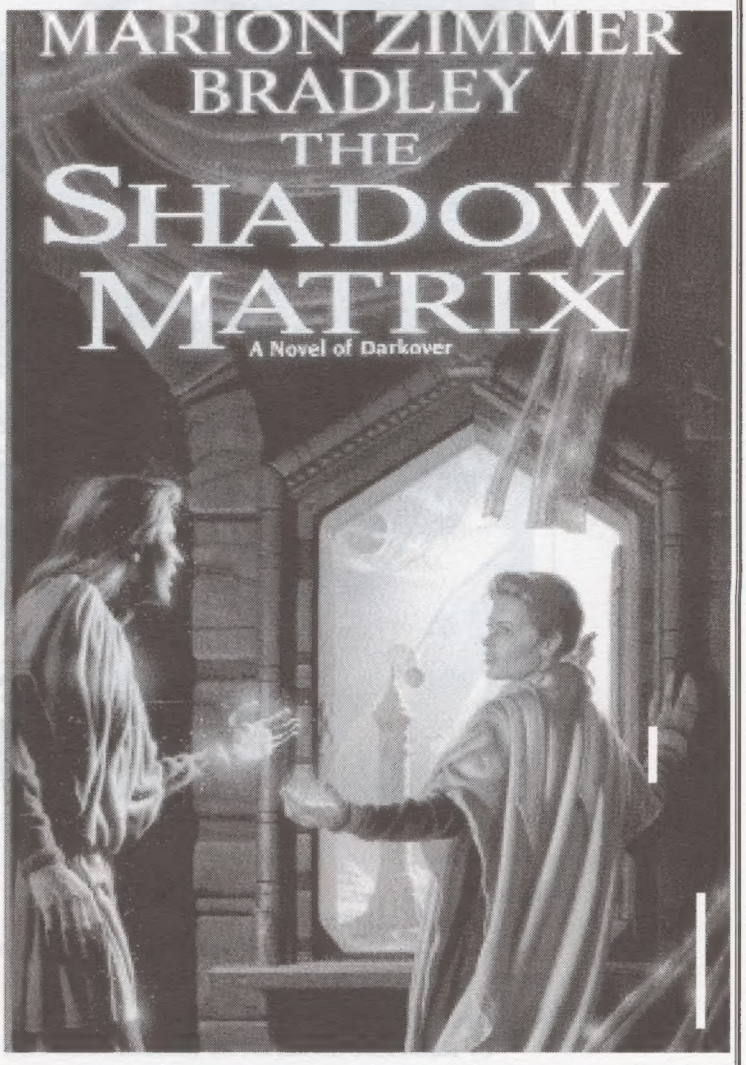

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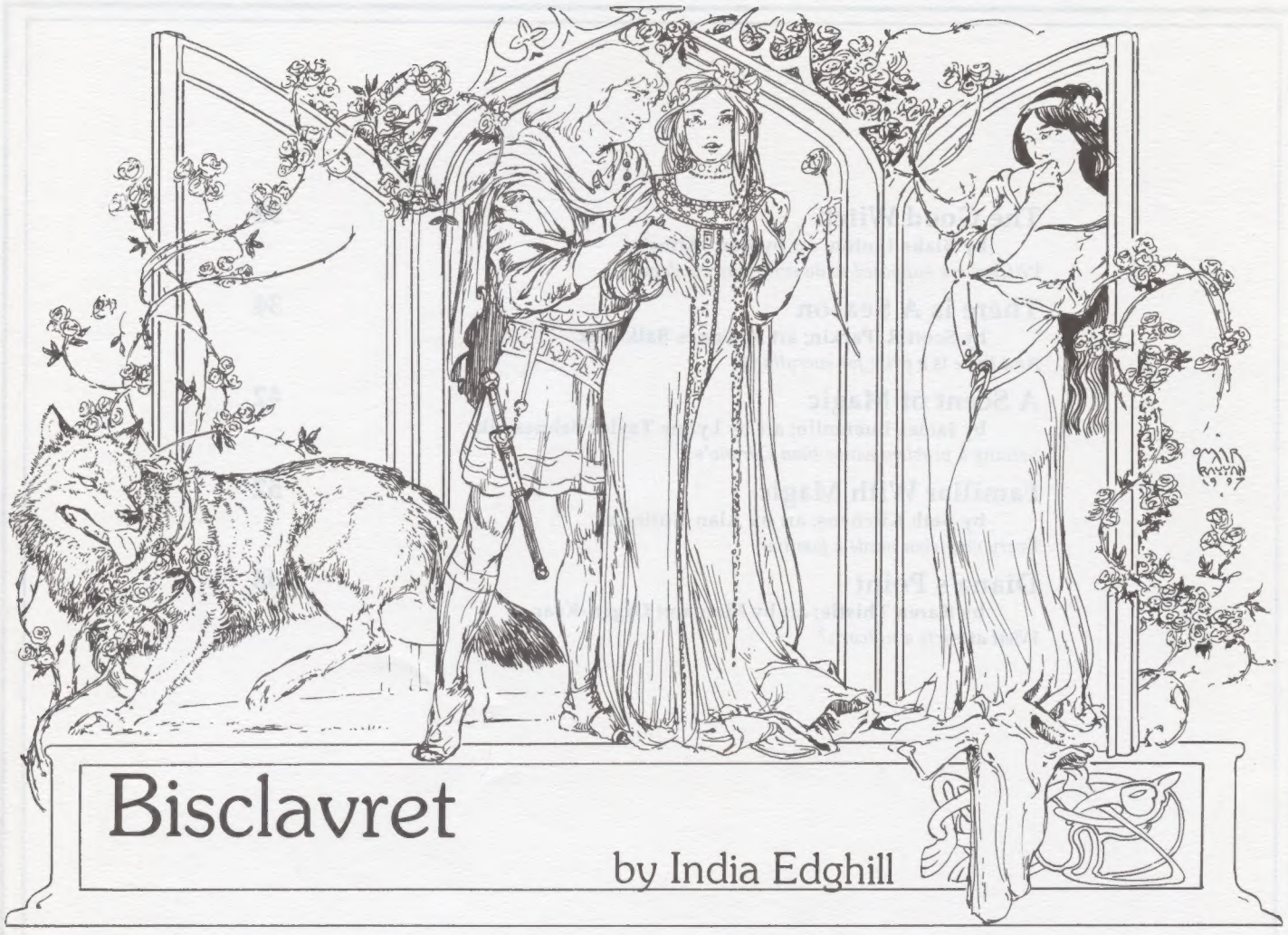


Bisclavret

by India Edghill

Artwork by Omar Rayyan

The land did not lie beyond the Morning; its people were, for the most part, human.

But the land lay close to the Border, and in those days it was not yet hard to travel between. And that was enough, as it so often was, and perhaps some day will be again.

Gavrilan's father had been a baron in the north country; all that was known of his mother was that she came from nowhere, and loved the lord of the manor fierce and hot. A wild thing, they called her. But during the long months she carried the lord's child beneath her heart she sat quiet at the loom, weaving as fast as a wolf can run.

Some whispered other things of his mother later, when Gavrilan was older, and they saw his eyes. But their hissing ceased when Gavrilan grew up handsome and open-handed; a good lord, and well-liked.

And when Gavrilan held the lordship for his own, he went down the country to the court, seeking what all proper young men seek: renown, and a wife.

Amorice was the most beautiful damsel in the king's court; everyone said so. Fair as high-summer's day, slender and supple as a weasel, with golden hair that fell to her knees when plaited and to her feet when loosed.

Ysavette's hair rippled dark as the lake at midnight and her eyes were moonsilver pale; darkness was not the fashion, and so everyone said she was not beautiful. A night-child, they called her. It was not a compliment.

The summer that Gavrilan came to court, Amorice was in the flower of her beauty and knew what she was worth.

As was the custom, the ladies of the court stood on the wall above the castle gate to welcome the new baron from the north. When Gavrilan rode his gray horse through the castle gate, Amorice looked down, and he looked up, and all he saw was a woman fair as the Queen of Heaven herself, with hair of shining gold and gown of blue.

Amorice saw that he was handsome; she knew that he was rich. And so she smiled down upon Gavrilan, and laid one soft jewelled hand upon the blue silk that covered her bosom, and blushed.

Ysavette knew that Gavrilan would not look past Day to see Night. But because he smiled and because he had eyes like the rising hunter's moon, Ysavette plucked the white rose she had tucked into her bodice that morning and dropped it down to Gavrilan.

The rose floated soft past his hand; Gavrilan caught it from the air and held its petals to his lips. Ysavette saw where his hunter's eyes looked, and knew he thought Amorice had given the white rose. But the rose had been warm from Ysavette's skin when Gavrilan touched it to his lips. That little was enough to make Ysavette smile.

Loves lifelong have fed upon less.

They were married by the bishop on Midsummer Day. Amorice wore a

gown of silver and a mantle of gold, and pearls braided her hair. Gavrilan wore a doublet of gold and a mantle of silver, and a white rose upon his breast.

The wedding feast lasted all the rest of the day and far into the night. Amorice sat in the bride's chair, and laughed and sipped her honeyed wine, and sometimes smiled at her new husband. Gavrilan looked at nothing but his bride, and his amber eyes glowed hot as coals in the torchlight.

Ysavette had watched them wed, and watched them feast, and the next day she stood on the wall above the castle gate and watched them ride away. And when the new-wed pair had ridden so far down the road that she could not even pretend she saw the dust behind them, Ysavette went back to the deserted banquet hall.

On the floor beside the groom's chair, she found the white rose that Gavrilan had worn for his wedding. The rose was broken, now, the white petals crushed and flat. Ysavette cradled the wounded rose against her breast and bowed her head upon the chair where Gavrilan had sat. And because he was gone and lost to her forever, and because she loved him so well she still wished only that he would be happy, Ysavette wept.

Large crystal tears stood in Amorice's fine eyes; her voice shuddered with heartbreak. "But where do you *go*, my heart's dearest? You love another, I know it!"

"Nay, sweet Amorice, there is no other. How could a man see another, loving you?"

"Then why will you not tell me? Oh, you will drive me mad with grief!"

"Amorice, I beg you will not press me. In this matter alone I am not free to speak." Helpless, Gavrilan watched his lovely wife weep. He could not bear to see her sadden; each month, when the moon was just past full, he was forced to watch her sorrow once again. He reached out, tentative, to stroke her supple back. "Now, sweeting —"

Amorice shuddered and drew away. "Go away, for I see you love me not, and all your fine presents and fine words mean nothing!"

In all respects save one, Gavrilan was a most decent and considerate husband. But each month he left Amorice, and would not tell her where, or why. All she knew was that for the three days that the moon shone full, Gavrilan vanished into the wild forest.

Amorice had questioned the castlekeep folk, of course; they swore they knew only that he had always gone so, ever since he was new-come to manhood. Amorice knew what *that* meant, well enough. A ladylove, hidden away from all eyes but his. That Amorice would not have; what was hers she kept.

"My darling, do not ask me," Gavrilan said.

"But why not? If you went on any innocent mission you would speak, and ease this torment I suffer!"

Gavrilan sat beside her, and took her into his arms. "I dare not tell you, for if I did your love would turn to hatred in a heartbeat, and that I could not bear. I have done you a great wrong, for I should never have married you, but I loved you so I could not help myself." And Gavrilan buried his face in her sun-bright hair.

"If that is all —" Amorice caressed his silver-tawny hair and smiled in triumph, for she knew that she had won. "If that is all that troubles you, fear nothing, for I shall love you always just as I do now."

And so then, of course, Gavrilan told her, although there were tales aplenty to warn him against breaking silence. But then, there were also tales aplenty to warn *her* against prying.

"Very well — and remember always that you swore you *must* know." Gavrilan turned away before he spoke. "My mother was not as other women, and so I am not as other men. I am a shapeshifter, Amorice; when the moon is full I run beneath it as a wolf."

And when Amorice was silent, he continued, "I hunt the deep woods on those nights, and never come near men. No man can say he has cause to fear the lord of Bisclavret, either as man or wolf." The silence stretched between them; desperate, he begged.

"Speak to me, beloved, I beg of you. Say something, if only to curse me and the day you saw me." Gavrilan reached

Artwork by Omar Rayyan

Artwork by Omar Rayyan

out to her, but when Amorice still neither spoke nor moved, he let his hand fall, and began to turn away.

Amorice thought fast and hard before she spoke. "A wolf! Still, it could be far worse — I had thought you had another wife hidden!"

"Never, beloved!" Gavrilan smiled at her in love, and Amorice saw only that his teeth were strong and white. But when he took her hand, she suffered it, and did not draw away.

"So my husband can change his shape to suit his fancy! Well, and how is such a thing done? Oh, come, you have already told me your great secret and you see it is not so much — tell me this."

Amorice wheedled and cozened, and stroked his cheek. And since she had not run from him in horror and seemed to love him still, Gavrilan smiled, and told Amorice how he rode into the woods, and left his horse safely partway, and went on foot into the very depths of the forest and there changed his two feet for four.

"And you run free as a wild beast! How exciting it sounds, my love. But do your clothes change as well, or do you —" Here Amorice blushed and looked modestly down, as if they had not been wed thirteen moons, and bed together thrice a hundred nights. "— run naked through the woods?"

"Beasts run naked, my love — and a wolf cannot unlace a doublet. As for dealing with hose —" Gavrilan laughed, and kissed her slim white hands. "Well, that is beyond praying for! No, I leave my clothes behind me, when the moon is full."

"Behind you? Where?"

But here Gavrilan shook his head. "No, it is best that remain my secret alone. Do not press me further, my dearest love, for that I will not tell."

And Amorice could get nothing more from him. So she gave up and sat patient while he kissed her hands again and swore on his knees that she was the fairest and most virtuous of women to love him still.

"Of course it makes no difference," Amorice assured him, smiling. "No difference at all."

Sir Lioline held a small keep a half day's ride from Castle Bisclavret. Sir Lioline had seen Gavrilan's lady riding past on her cloud-white palfrey; had seen her dancing in her husband's hall; had brooded and burned by turns for love of her. Amorice had laughed at him and called him a country-knight, for she was used to better at the king's court.

But now that she could not bear to think of her husband, Amorice could bear to think of Sir Lioline. Sir Lioline was not a great lord, but he was undeniably human, which was more than Amorice could say of her lawful husband.

Amorice sat long and worked carefully over the message that she sent to the hopeful knight. At last she wrote only, "If you would have me, come to me when next the moon is full."

The day that next the moon was full Sir Lioline came to Bisclavret and met Amorice in the castle garden, beneath the red rose tree. Amorice yielded one kiss, and one caress, and then put the rose tree between them.

"Nay, my good Lioline, take this instead." Amorice plucked a rose and offered it. "But beware of thorns, for they are plentiful, as I have found to my cost." She sighed, and drooped, and a drop of blood fell from her finger and she cried out.

Sir Lioline caught up her hand, and flung the rose away, and kissed the small wound cut by the rose's thorn. "Only say the word, my lady, and I will take my sword and hack this traitorous tree to kindling for this!"

The lady sighed again, and her lashes fluttered damp. "Oh, to have a man who would do for me what must be done!"

Sir Lioline swore instantly upon his life and sword and honor that he would do whatsoever she demanded of him. "For I am your slave, my lady — only give me the chance to prove my love and make you mine indeed."

He expected to be set some vexing task, some silly test, before the lady yielded, for that was how this game was played. To hear instead that her lord husband was a werewolf, and that she herself went in terror of her life and was driven nigh to madness by fear, made Sir Lioline stare, for the day of fairy-tales was nearly done.

But his lady-love had begged his aid, so Sir Lioline politely offered to slay her husband.

"No, no, that would be a grievous sin! And someone might discover it. No, I would not hurt him for my soul's sake — but live with him as my husband I cannot."

"Nor would any right-thinking Christian ask it of you. Well, then, what would satisfy you?"

"What satisfies me will satisfy you." Amorice's voice purred with promise.

"Well, yes, my lady. Of course it will. But what, then, would you have me do?"

"I do not know! Oh, dear Sir Lioline, can you think of nothing save to slay him?" Amorice laid a hand to her round bosom and fingered the laces at her white throat. "It seems so cruel, yet I must be free of him!"

Sir Lioline agreed with all his heart that free of such a husband Amorice must be; he bade Amorice sit quiet while he thought. After a time, he asked hopefully,

"Can you think of anything, my own, anything at all, that he does differently on those days?"

"Nothing, nothing. Oh, but I cannot bear it! I shall die of fear if he does not slay me first!" Amorice wept.

Now, Sir Lioline was not a great thinker, but he was at least clever enough to seek out those who were. And where better, so Sir Lioline declared, to seek the wise than at the king's court?

The lady Amorice — who knew the king's court — was doubtful, but Sir Lioline swore faithfully that he would return successful to his lady-love before next the moon was full. "And then I shall free you from this curse, my lady — my oath upon it!"

* * *

The king's court was not what Sir Lioline (who was, after all, only a country-knight) expected. This king's court glittered like noonday sun on water. Sir Lioline sought the strong cool depths beneath the brilliant surface, only to discover there were no depths to plumb.

Alone and doleful, Sir Lioline wandered at last beyond the great halls and gilded passages, into a quiet room lined floor to ceiling with shelves. Endless lines of volumes both thick and slender stood ranked upon the shelves; books large and books small, books of leather and books of cloth, books jeweled and books plain-covered.

"Are you lost, good sir? Do you seek the hall of games, or perhaps the tourney-field?" A slender form emerged from the room's shadows; a woman, young and quiet, with dusky hair bound close round her head.

She seemed half a shadow herself; still, she was plainly a lady, so Sir Lioline bowed. "Nay, I seek —" Here he hesitated, for he had been much mocked this fortnight past, and was growing wary.

"A book, perhaps?" she suggested, and her voice was soft as evening breeze, and kind.

"An answer," Sir Lioline confessed at last.

"An answer," she said. "To what question, good sir?"

Sir Lioline hesitated again, for he could not imagine that a plain little shadow could aid him when the king's grace could not. But she regarded him with patient eyes, and at last Sir Lioline spoke.

"These books —" He gestured, indicating the sweep of man-bound knowledge stored upon the polished shelves. "Do any of them speak of —"

"Of what, sir?" she asked, when he stopped, glaring at the books that were closed to him. Sir Lioline had seen a book once; it had been writ in Latin and he had not been able to read it.

"Shapeshifters." Sir Lioline flung the word, defiant.

"Of course." She did not laugh. "Many books of the old lore dream here. What would you know?"

Much encouraged, Sir Lioline explained that he wished to know the means by which a man might become a wolf. Still the dark lady did not mock him; she stood in thought for a moment, and then went to a far shelf and took down a slim volume bound in red leather. Sir Lioline dared not speak as she paged through, and at last paused, her finger marking a place.

"Here —" She looked at Sir Lioline, and then began to read aloud. "Those who shift their form from animal to man and back again —"

"It is from man to animal," Sir Lioline interrupted.

"Of course," the dark lady said, and her soft mouth was grave. She turned the page again. "Here it says this: that a man of the old blood — one from

Artwork by Omar Rayyan

Beyond the Morning — may possess a charm that allows him to alter his form when the moon is full."

"What charm?"

Again she scanned the pages. "Why, most often it is a garment fashioned from the fur of the beast whose form he chooses. Take away that garment, and the man cannot become the beast."

"Or the beast, the man?" Sir Lioline asked, after a moment's thought.

"Or the beast, the man again," confirmed the learned lady. "And if you would prevent him changing form ever again, you must burn the garment."

"Fire breaks the spell?" Sir Lioline asked eagerly.

"That I do not know — but without the shifter's charm there can be no change. So if one would remain man only, it is safest to burn the magic garment." She smiled, and closed the red leather book. "Is that what you wished to know, sir knight?"

Sir Lioline bowed over her gentle hand. "You have done me and mine a great service, lady. How may I repay you?"

"Why, to know there is one who values knowledge is payment enough." She smiled again, and her eyes were wistful; clouded moons. "There is naught else you can do for me."

"Will you at least tell me your name, lady, that I may pray for you?"

"Why, my name is no secret. I am Ysavette. And I think rather, good sir knight, that it is I who should pray for you."

"His cloak! It must be his magic charm — for he wears it each time he rides into the forest, and it is lined with wolf fur!"

"Very likely you are right, my love," Sir Lioline said. "So you see, the task is simple. I have only to remove his wolf-fur cloak, and then you may burn it and rest easy." Sir Lioline did not think the Church would insist upon a lady's remaining espoused to a wolf; he thought, ardently, of the lady's promises....

To his astonishment, Amorice paled. "No, no, my dearest love," she cried, catching at his woolen sleeve. "While you were gone I pondered much upon what you had said. Yes, and prayed upon my knees for guidance, too. I was foolish and womanly to argue and make petty objections to your gallant plan."

"Now, now," soothed Sir Lioline, patting Amorice's soft white hand, "you were overwrought, my love. But your kind heart and conscience shall not trouble you, for there is no need for slaying. And perhaps Lord Gavrilan will prefer to remain a wolf," Sir Lioline finished hopefully, sliding his arm about Amorice's supple waist.

"Listen to me — I know now that you were right, and I wrong. You must wait until he is a wolf, and then you must slay him." For Amorice had indeed thought while Sir Lioline was gone — and the thought of Gavrilan the wolf lurking about the castle of Bisclavret, waiting to spring upon her at any moment, was not to be endured.

"You must slay him, for it is the only way we two shall ever know peace in our lives." The lady Amorice laid her palm upon Sir Lioline's chest, over his heart. Two crystal-pure tears rolled down her ivory cheeks.

And that, of course, settled the matter.

* * *

As he had done each full moon since he had become a man, Lord Gavrilan of Bisclavret rode out from his castle, the cloak lined with wolf-fur flung over his broad shoulders. He had kissed his wife before he rode away; she had smiled, and bade him soon return to her. Wherefore Gavrilan smiled as he rode to the farm at the forest's edge where he left his horse. And he smiled, too, as he strode deeper into the wild forest.

The full moon seemed still tangled in the upper branches when Lord Gavrilan reached the abandoned chapel. Here he stripped himself of his clothes and placed them, wrapped with care in the wolf-fur cloak, in a hollow beneath the ancient altar.

The chapel's roof had long ago fallen away; freed of human ties, Gavrilan stood and stared up at the moon. And as the full round moon cleared the topmost branches, he shifted, giving himself joyously to the change.

Moon-called, Gavrilan the wolf padded from the heap of tumbled stones that once had been a sacred house, and fled away into the night-shadowed depths of the woods.

Artwork by Omar Rayyan

A hunting dog well-trained in tracking, and a useful simplicity of mind, enabled Sir Lioline to discover the ancient chapel. The moment he set eyes on the place, the knight was certain it was where Lord Gavrilan secreted his magic cloak. A ruined chapel: what place more appropriate for unholy deeds?

Sir Lioline searched and found the neatly-bundled clothing beneath the altar-stone. He flung the wolf-fur cloak onto the stones before him, drew his sword, and began to wait for Lord Gavrilan's return.

The moon rose higher, and night's shadows darkened to midnight. Sir Lioline, waiting, laid his sword across his knees and began to think — longer and harder than was his usual habit.

To challenge Lord Gavrilan to mortal combat, to wager his own life in the contest — well, that was the way of knighthood.

But Lord Gavrilan was a noble man, and strong. Perhaps dearest Amorice was right; better to swallow knightly pride and slay Lord Gavrilan while he was still an unsuspecting beast.

But that meant facing an angry wolf — and a werewolf at that — alone, with only a swordblade between Sir Lioline and ravening fangs.

In fact, the more he thought, the less Sir Lioline liked either plan. But he had promised the lady Amorice....

In the hour before dawn, a plan occurred to Sir Lioline that was far safer than challenging either Lord Gavrilan or the wolf.

Pleased with his own cleverness, Sir Lioline sheathed his sword and rode away from the ruined chapel in the heart of the wood. With him he took Lord Gavrilan's wolf-fur cloak to offer up to Amorice as proof that she need no longer fear her husband.

Amorice received Sir Lioline at dawn, barefoot and wearing her best cambric shift. When he laid his burden at her feet she caught up the cloak and held it to her like the hope of heaven. "You have done it! For me!"

"He will never trouble you again, my love," Sir Lioline assured her. "You are free — free to be mine at last." He would have taken Amorice into his arms, but the mass of Gavrilan's cloak came between them.

"You are sure?" she demanded. "Quite sure that he is dead?"

"You are safe from him forever," Sir Lioline swore recklessly."

That gained him Amorice's white hand to kiss, and a quiver of her slim fingers under his lips that hinted at more he might have.

"You have saved me, sir knight," she murmured low. "I do not know how I may repay your kindness."

"You know how I would be repaid, my lady." Sir Lioline reached out to his lady-love, and his voice was thick with desire.

"Oh, sir," Amorice reproved him, "I am a poor widow now. Do you think it right to approach me so soon?" She meant it mocking-light, but Sir Lioline was in no temper for frivolity, and had no wit for jests at the best of times.

"Well, then, tell me how long we must wait. Send me word and I'll bring along the priest to wed us."

Amorice stared at him over the wolf-fur cloak. "Wed us?"

"Well, of course," said Sir Lioline, staring in his turn. "You're free now, my love, as we planned. Of course I assumed you meant — my love is true, never doubt it."

Amorice had never once thought of wedding Sir Lioline once his use was past, for a rich widow might look much, much higher than a poor country-knight for a second husband. Reward of her Sir Lioline should have — Amorice would not shirk her duty to a sworn knight. But she had expected the gallant Sir Lioline to be satisfied with mere carnal delights.

Now it seemed to Amorice that Sir Lioline had laid some stress upon the little word "my". And "as we planned" simply did not sound well, and would sound even less well repeated.

"My love is as true as yours," Amorice assured him fervently. "But we must be cautious, my dearest knight — people must not talk about me, or you."

"If I hear a word against you, my gauntlet will be at the knave's feet!" swore her dearest knight. "Let them talk and I'll run them through!"

Which was all very flattering, but utterly useless for stemming malicious gossip. Amorice sighed, as if with love and admiration, and told Sir Lioline again that they must wait. "And then you shall have all you desire, and more. Now you may kiss me, and then you must go."

Sir Lioline availed himself of this gracious permission, receiving in reward a taste of lips as perfect as hothouse peaches.

"Trust me," Amorice whispered. "I know best in this."

"Very well," said Sir Lioline, sulky as a boy deprived of sweets. "Send for me as soon as you think it safe — perhaps tomorrow, or the next day. And do not forget to burn that cloak."

"I swear on my love for you," said Amorice, "that I will not forget."

But when Amorice stood alone in the clear dawn light, she looked again at Gavrilan's cloak. The fur lining was

Artwork by Omar Rayyan

timeworn, and the fur was a grizzled gray besides, but the cloak's outer velvet had been replaced only last Lady Day — the finest velvet, too, thick and heavy as seal. And such trouble taken to find that precious color: a gold pale as honey or as amber. As true a gold as Gavrilan's yellow eyes —

No. Amorice would not think of Gavrilan. Nor did she think of Sir Lioline, and the promise she had given. Instead, Amorice thought of that fine velvet burned to smoke and ash; fine velvet that could be used in so many ways for sleeves and girdles and tippets....

Gavrilan was dead; Sir Lioline had slain him. What did it matter, then, if the wolf's cloak burned or not?

Near moonset the wolf loped back through the forest to the ruined chapel. He slowed to an easy trot as he neared the overgrown jumble of stone and veered through a gap in what had once been the back wall, heading for the altar under which his clothes lay hidden.

The altar smelled sharp and metallic of Man. The wolf flattened his ears and approached cautiously.

His clothes were there, but his cloak was not. The wolf nosed beneath the altar, then dug frantically at the fallen rocks, then ran searching in ever-widening circles through chapel and the little clearing beyond.

At last the wolf slunk back to the altar. His cloak was gone. Gone, and with it his humanity. Gone, and only one person had known his secret. His wife.

His fair, his perfect, his loving wife —

Gavrilan the wolf threw back his head and howled his loneliness and betrayal to the uncaring moon.

The day before the next full moon, a lord and his lady rode up the broad road to the king's court. Ysavette stood and watched as Sir Lioline rode once more through the king's gate — with the lady Amorice riding beside him.

As the other ladies smiled and called out greetings, Ysavette paled until her skin was white as the full moon. Hastening down the narrow stone stairway, she arrived in the great courtyard in time to see Sir Lioline lift Amorice from the docile palfrey. Smiling, Amorice slid from the knight's grasp and shook out her mantle, displaying her gown to best advantage. A splendid gown, worth showing; a gown whose clinging bodice and tight-buttoned sleeves of velvet glowed in the noonday sun like honey, or like amber.

Or like Lord Gavrilan's yellow eyes.

Ysavette looked at the golden velvet, and at Amorice's laughing face, and at Sir Lioline's hungry eyes. And Ysavette remembered Sir Lioline's quest for knowledge, and what he had asked of her....

The knight and the lady stood now handfast before the king, swearing to him that the lady Amorice's husband had met with an untimely accident —

"In the hunt," Sir Lioline put in — for it was Amorice who spoke the most. "A wolf got him," he added.

Amorice cut him a blade-sharp look. "Yes," she murmured, bowing her fair head, and began to speak of her desolation and despair, and of the kindness of Sir Lioline in her time of trial.

Dark Ysavette walked forward until she stood close behind Amorice. "Has the wolf been slain?" she asked.

Amorice spun around and found herself staring into Ysavette's moon-pale eyes. "Why — of course," Amorice said. "Sir Lioline slew the brute himself."

Ysavette looked past Amorice. "How valiant, sir knight. Did you indeed slay such a monstrous beast?"

Sir Lioline hesitated until all stared at him; Amorice hardest of all. "No," Sir Lioline said at last. "The beast escaped me."

Amorice gasped, and the rose-color drained from her smooth cheeks. "But you swore to me —" she began, then closed her lips over any further words.

"The beast that killed the Lord of Bisclavret still lives?" The king rubbed his hands together, anticipating pleasure. "Then we will go and hunt it down! Bisclavret's forests have good hunting, so I hear. Be easy, my lady — we shall avenge your husband's death."

The castle of the Lord of Bisclavret was not a happy dwelling-place now. Ysavette needed no Morning-Land powers to glean that knowledge, for it was plain even to mortal eyes that the castlefolk mourned their lost lord, and did not love their new. And they watched their lady with slanted eyes, and glances from shadows, and muttered to each other in the dark beyond the great hall's fire.

But the lady Amorice paid no heed to mutterings, or to sullen eyes. Indeed, Amorice was all sunlit delight to be entertaining the king and all his court — no matter to her that the cost would near bankrupt Bisclavret, and the castlefolk go on lean rations in the winter soon to come. Sir Lioline had dared to mention this only once; Amorice had flayed him with a few choice words, and Sir Lioline — who liked being called "false knight" and "traitor" no more than any other man — abandoned all attempts to make his Amorice see reason.

Let Amorice spend what she pleased, and if the king indeed slew the enchanted wolf, so much the better.

Ysavette had no interest in riotous pleasures. Soon after the first pitchers of spiced wine had been emptied and sent back to the kitchens to be filled again, she slipped from her place at the long table, unnoticed as a twilight shadow.

Nor was it difficult for her to make her way to the stables and saddle her swift black mare, or to ride unchallenged out of the stone keep. All attention was focused on the king and his high lords and ladies; there was none to spare for oddities, such as a gentle lady choosing to ride into the forest by night.

Ysavette had taken no easy task upon herself, nor a safe one. The night was dark and the woods ancient; Ysavette the scholar knew that in such woods as these the Lords of Night still held sway. And there were other things that moved between the Lands by night —

The black mare shied and Ysavette's blood pounded hard. But then the mare steadied and snorted; only wind through dying leaves, or perhaps a fox skittering past. Nothing more, yet Ysavette's hands were cold as snow within her silk-embroidered gloves. But though her fingers trembled on the black mare's reins, Ysavette rode on, deeper into the midnight woods.

As the moon rose full overhead Ysavette rode up to a ruined chapel half-hidden by a tangle of berry bushes and fallen trees. The roof had fallen away; through the doorway Ysavette saw moonlight shining silver on the altar-stone. And beyond the stone, twin flashes of moon-gold.

Wolf eyes.

"My lord? My lord of Bisclavret?" Ysavette tried to force her mount closer to the chapel doorway; fearful, the mare

Artwork by Omar Rayyan

dug in her dainty hooves and shuddered, shaking her head. Plainly she would go no nearer.

Risking much, Ysavette unhooked her knee from the pommel and slid to the ground in a whisper of heavy silk. The instant her weight left the saddle, her mare danced away. Ysavette made one hopeless attempt to catch up the rein again, but the little mare turned and fled back into the darkness beneath the trees.

Left alone in the chapel clearing, Ysavette pressed her gloved hands over her bosom to calm the wild beating of her heart. Then she gathered up her heavy skirts and walked towards the ruined doorway, and called out again to the lord of Bisclavret. There was no answer, unless the harsh sound she heard was a wolf's low growl, and not the rising wind through the chapel's ruined walls.

"My lord?" In the remains of the doorway, she halted, seeking to see what lay within. Taking much on faith, Ysavette sank to her knees; she pulled off one embroidered glove and held out her bare hand. "Gavrilan?"

Silent as smoke, the wolf came forward, slinking low out of the night shadows. Ysavette waited, and spoke as calmly as if they met in a garden, or in a ballroom.

"My lord Gavrilan? Perhaps you do not recall me; I am the demoiselle Ysavette. We met at the king's court two years gone. You once danced with me." In a whisper soft as evening breeze, she said, "Once I gave you a white rose."

The wolf flinched back, ducking its massive head, as if ashamed to be seen. Ysavette spoke on, still holding out her hand. "I know what you are, my lord Gavrilan; I know what you have lost. I will help you — if it has not been burned, I will find your shifter's cloak, and you may be as you wish to be."

The beast's head lifted; Ysavette looked into Gavrilan's wolf-gold eyes. "I swear it," she said. "By Our Lady's rose, I swear I shall help you."

A shudder swept through the wolf; the yellow eyes closed. Then it stepped forward and bent its head over Ysavette's outstretched hand. Hot breath washed her cool skin, and then the wolf's tongue flicked across her steady fingertips.

"Do not thank me yet, my lord. If the shifter's fur is gone —" But Ysavette did not think it was. Among her other faults, the lady Amorice was heedless. Once the crisis was over — the husband vanished, the cloak's velvet stolen — Ysavette suspected the fur itself had simply been bundled off and forgotten. If it had not, if it had indeed been burned to silver ash —

"We will find it," Ysavette said, and slid her fingers into the warm depths of

Artwork by Omar Rayyan

the wolf's tawny fur. Keeping her fingers twined in the wolf's ruff, she rose to her feet. "Now come, my lord, for we have a long way to walk before daylight."

The wolf had not wished to enter Bisclavret, and no words would move him; only when Ysavette wept had Gavrilan relented, and followed her through the castle gate.

In the pale hour before dawn, the courtyard was a turmoil of hounds and leather-clad riders on plunging horses. At the sight of the lady Ysavette and the wolf, the hounds uttered howls of outrage and flung themselves towards their enemy.

"No!" cried Ysavette, and dropped to her knees, wrapping her arms around Gavrilan's wolfen body even as he struggled to leap between her and the oncoming hounds.

There was a confusion of shouting huntsmen and cracking dog-whips; after a few moments the hunting hounds, unwillingly obedient, backed away from their lawful prey. In the new silence, the king rode slowly up to Ysavette and the wolf; his stallion's hooves rang against the courtyard stones like iron bells.

"Maiden," said the king, "what means this?"

Clutching Gavrilan's ruff with one hand, Ysavette rose to her feet. She looked past the king's stallion to the lady Amorice's bone-white face, and then to Sir Lioline's appalled stare. Then she curtsied to the king. "Your majesty," she said, "I beg a boon."

"*No!*" Amorice's cry pierced the chill dawn air, a sound of fear and pleading.

The wolf's muscles tensed beneath Ysavette's fingers; in a moment he would leap, and rend, and all hope would be lost. "*No*," Ysavette whispered, and the small word fell from her lips to Gavrilan's flattened ears, carrying all her longing and all her love.

The wolf looked across the courtyard at the terrified Amorice and the truculent Sir Lioline. And slowly, slowly, the king turned his head and followed the wolf's accusing gaze. And all the rest of the hunting party looked where the king looked, and all saw guilt written plain on the lady Amorice's perfect face.

"It is not her fault!" Sir Lioline declared, spurring his horse between Amorice and the wolf's steady eyes. "She did nothing — it was I —"

"Yes," cried Amorice, "it was he; I pleaded with him, but he forced me —"

The king held up his hand; his jeweled gauntlet glinted blood red in the torches' light. "Be silent. Let the maiden

speak, as the wolf cannot."

Her fingers entwined in Gavrilan's fur, Ysavette spoke, and the king listened. And at last Ysavette turned her moonsilver eyes to Amorice.

"The lord Gavrilan's wolfskin cloak," Ysavette said, and her fingers stroked through Gavrilan's silver-tawny fur. "The cloak you stole to sew yourself a velvet gown — where is the wolfskin now?"

Amorice looked to the left, and to the right, and saw only curiosity and condemnation. At last she looked at Sir Lioline.

"I told you to burn the cloak." Sir Lioline spoke as one who has battled long, and is now weary unto death. "But I suppose you didn't."

"I told you to kill the wolf," Amorice spat back, "but I know you didn't." Reaching inside the neck of her gown, she pulled out a key strung upon a silver chain. "That moth-eaten old fur is in the cedar chest in my storeroom. Do what you please with it."

Holding her chin high, Amorice flung the key down to clatter onto the stones before Ysavette's feet. Ysavette knelt and put her white hand on the key; before she rose again, Gavrilan touched his nose to her moon-pale cheek. Ysavette smiled at him and stood before the king in all the glory of her torn and woods-stained dress.

"Send a man to bring that wolfskin," the king said, staring at Gavrilan dubiously, "and then we will see."

That day was long ago, and in the years since the *Lais de Loup-Garou* has been sung in many a fine castle hall and in many a fine inn as well. The tale is a popular ballad now, oft asked of *jongleur* and troubadour. And for each singer, the song has a different ending.

"— dumb beast though he was, the wolf knew his faithless wife, and desired revenge. Leaping upon her, his white fangs ravaged her, and then —"

"— the wolfskin was brought at the king's command, and what had been a cursed beast sprang to his feet as the Lord Gavrilan. Grasping the king's sword, he swore vengeance upon the traitor knight Lioline and —"

"— but the Lord of Bisclavret was tainted by night and shadow. So the king passed judgment upon the cursed lord, and —"

"— the fair Amorice wept and kissed her husband's hands, and he wept and forgave her —"

"— the king —"

"— the knight —"

"— the lady —"

"— the wolf —"

When Lord Gavrilan stood once more as a man, he spoke just one word to Amorice, his golden wife. "Why?"

Words fled from Amorice; she stared about wildly, seeking a protector. Long heartbeats passed, and then Ysavette spoke into the silence before dawn.

"Because," said Ysavette, "she did not love you."

Gavrilan turned away from Amorice, and from the king, and from the watching courtiers, to look deep into Ysavette's moonshadowed eyes. Then he smiled, and took Ysavette's hand.

"Take the castle, then," Gavrilan told Sir Lioline. "Take the lady too."

"No!" cried Amorice. And Amorice would have run to Gavrilan, but the king rode his black stallion forward to bar her path.

"You would do better, Madame, to remember that you were Lord Gavrilan's wife," the king told her, and turned his eyes to Gavrilan where he stood with Ysavette. "Is this all you ask as justice, Lord Gavrilan? You might ask much more."

"It is enough," said Gavrilan.

"Granted, then," said the king, and looked cold upon Amorice and Lioline. "You, lady, will wed this knight who has performed such a task to win you. And you, sir knight, will wed this lady whose faithful love you already know so well."

Lady Amorice stood white as ice, and Sir Lioline clasped his sword's hilt to hide the trembling of his hands. Neither looked at the other.

"And never again," the king decreed, "shall either of you come unto the king's court. You desired this castle; here, then, you shall abide. This is the king's justice. Hear and obey."

Gavrilan smiled, and some who watched thought his teeth shone oversharp in the rising light. "And I warn you, take good care of Bisclavret and its folk, my lord and my lady fair, or you will have a wolf at your door!"

Still smiling, Gavrilan dropped the shifter's skin to the cobblestones just before the dawning sun cleared the treetops. Once more a wolf stood beside dark Ysavette, and the wolf's fire-gold eyes laughed at the morning light —

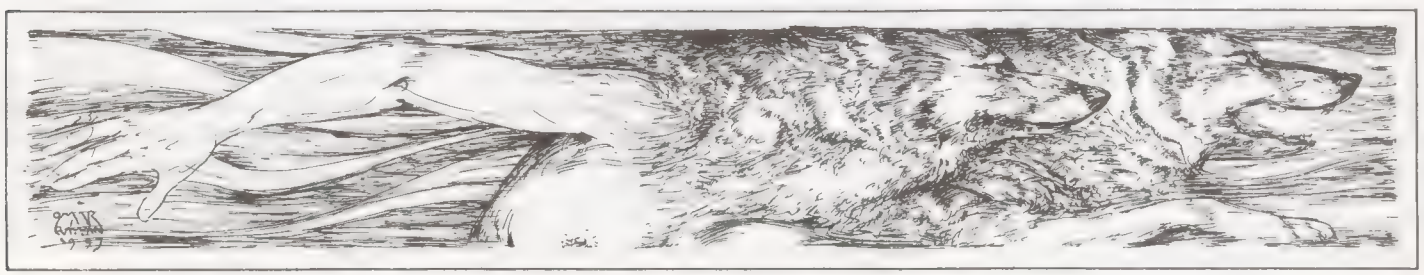
"— and then the dark maiden caught up the wolf's skin, and flung it about her own shoulders. Two wolves fled through the gate of Castle Bisclavret that day, and were never after seen by sunlight or by men —

"— but forever hunt as true-loves through all the wild midnights, running free beneath the winter stars."

India Edghill based the story "Bisclavret" on a twelfth-century *lais* by Marie de France. She ha sold stories to **CATFANTASTIC IV**, *F&SF*, and the Datlow/Windling Fairy Tales anthology #5. She has written an as-yet-unpublished novel about Queen Michal of Israel and is working on another historical novel.

Margaret Davis wishes she'd been born in the twelfth century, when she would have spent her time singing, playing the harp, calligraphing, and illuminating. Coincidentally, that's what she does now.

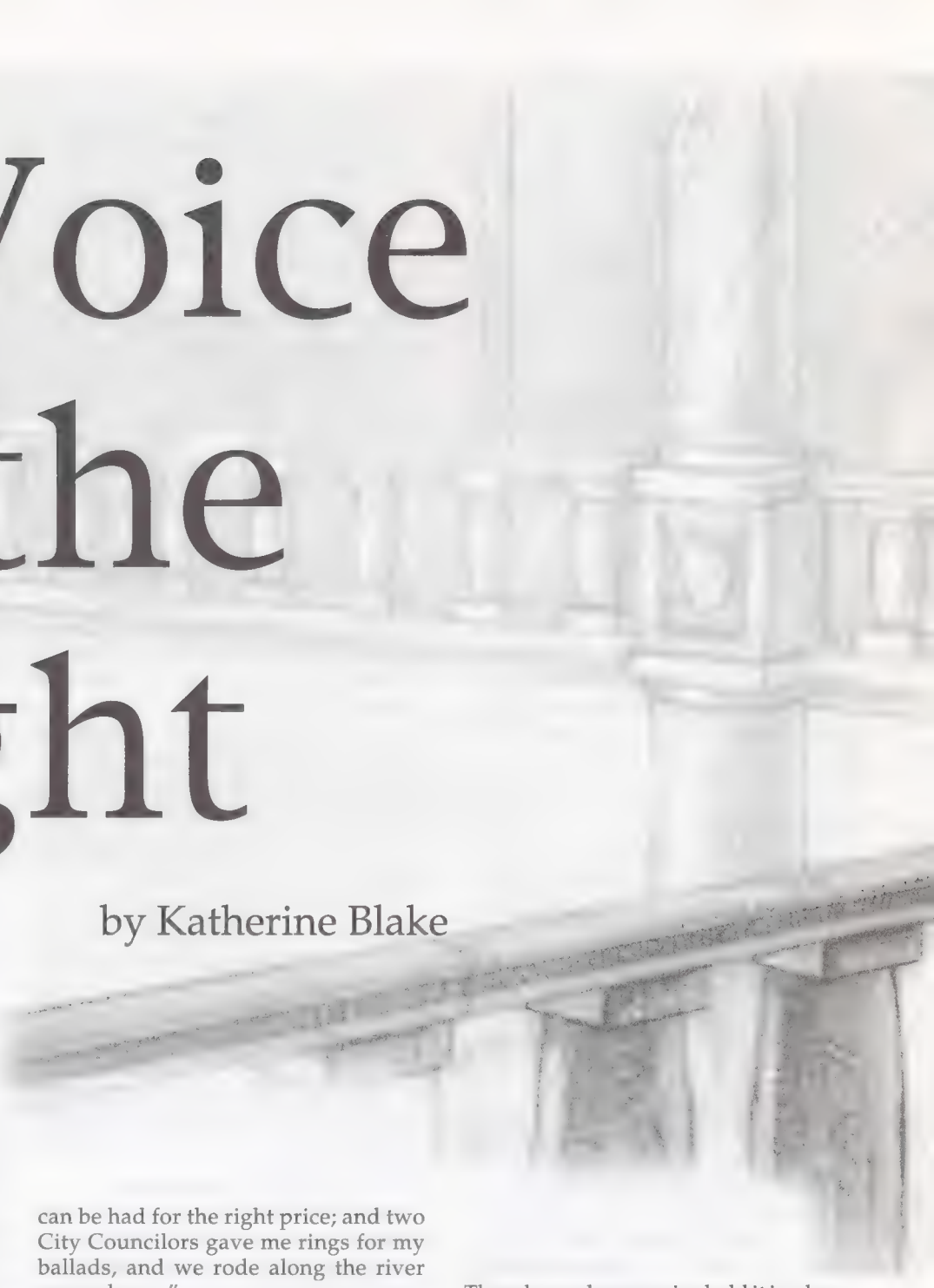
Omar Rayyan began drawing unicorns at the age of two and hasn't gotten the opportunity to do one unicorn job since. But magazines, children's books, and gaming cards have kept him busy and won him the occasional award. He lives in West Tisbury, MA, with his one wife, two cats, 12 fish, and a pretentious budgie.



Artwork by Omar Rayyan

A Voice in the Night

by Katherine Blake



A hundred voices fell silent, in the brief pause the countryfolk called "a sprite's passing," and for a moment Mathali heard something outside, something like the howl of a distant stormwind, shrill and sweet as a soprano in a fit of temper. But that was absurd: the weather had been as calm as milk all day long.

The Great Hall of the College of Bards was lit with many torches, though it was Midsummer and still bright daylight outside. At the high table Mistress Kleili sat among her honored guests, Finjar the harpist and a pair of lutenists from the south, and the legendary Mai.

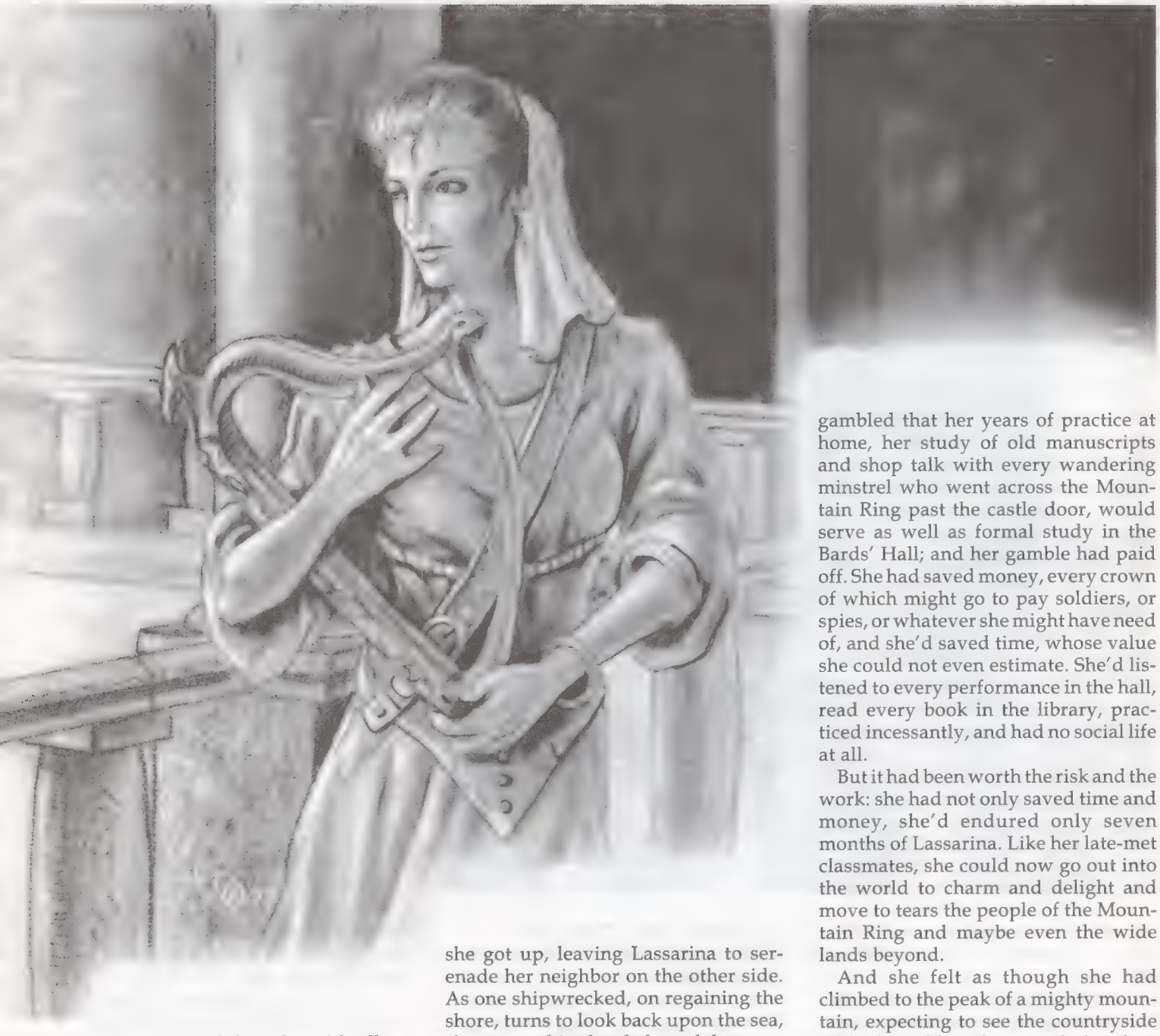
The feast was drawing to an end at last; the wine bottles, dead soldiers, stood in uneven ranks along the floor behind the tables and apprentices on serving duty collected the voiders full of fruit rinds and well-picked bones. Mathali sat in her place among the seniors to whose ranks she had this day been admitted.

"... And then I spent a month in Karsten," Lassarina was saying, "where all the trade routes cross, and anything can be had for the right price; and two City Councilors gave me rings for my ballads, and we rode along the river every day ..."

Mathali, who had grown up in Karsten, smiled a little and nodded, and emptied her wine cup. On her breast, over a gown of green and gold, lay a broad band embroidered in many colors, the baldric of a trained and acknowledged bard, announcing her rank and skill to the patrons and audiences of the Mountain Ring.

She bent her head to stretch the taut muscles of her neck and shoulders, and the folds of a silken head-veil fell around her face: the gift, not of a Councilor, but of her voicemistress. ("To hide the grey hairs singing all 'round the Ring will give you. Look at me.") Three heavy bronze pins held it in place. She wore the gift tonight for gratitude's sake; tomorrow it would go into the saddlebags.

At the high table, Kleili set down her wine cup and rubbed her eyes. She was still very beautiful, with the shining bronze hair framing the perfect oval of her face, although hard work had begun to draw lines around the dark eyes. She had taken up the rule of the College in panicky haste, when the Master her husband had fallen ill or gone mad or whatever he had done — no one ever saw him now — and made it a better place, a temple of music, the gods' workshop.



Artwork by Jonathan & Lisa Hunt

"... And in Celidor where it's all up and down," Lassarina went on, "rugged peaks and little green valleys set between them, bright as emerald. But my heart wouldn't take all the climbing, and the air is too thin, so I had to go away again ..."

And Mathali, who had been wedded and widowed in Celidor and driven off while her own heart broke, raised a finger to call for more wine — and lowered it again. She mustn't get to the point of saying things she'd later regret. Instead she murmured an apology — something about visiting the necessary — and rose from her seat. But she slung her harp over her shoulder (the silver strings whispered) as she got up, leaving Lassarina to serenade her neighbor on the other side. As one shipwrecked, on regaining the shore, turns to look back upon the sea, she stopped in the shelter of the stout pillars that supported the galleries and turned to survey the scene. Lassarina was also in gold-threaded green, and her nervous little fingers ran along the edge of the baldric she had won today. A voice like a dove's, and a deft hand with a melodic line — but unless she or someone else was singing, the woman never stopped talking. All her classmates knew everything about her, nine times over. Mathali found a staircase and climbed into the gallery that ran around three sides of the hall.

It had been a hard seven months, challenging the many examinations on her own skills, without having taken the years of training first. She'd gambled that her years of practice at home, her study of old manuscripts and shop talk with every wandering minstrel who went across the Mountain Ring past the castle door, would serve as well as formal study in the Bards' Hall; and her gamble had paid off. She had saved money, every crown of which might go to pay soldiers, or spies, or whatever she might have need of, and she'd saved time, whose value she could not even estimate. She'd listened to every performance in the hall, read every book in the library, practiced incessantly, and had no social life at all.

But it had been worth the risk and the work: she had not only saved time and money, she'd endured only seven months of Lassarina. Like her late-met classmates, she could now go out into the world to charm and delight and move to tears the people of the Mountain Ring and maybe even the wide lands beyond.

And she felt as though she had climbed to the peak of a mighty mountain, expecting to see the countryside all laid out like a banquet before her, and found instead a grey and featureless plain stretching out to the horizon.

It was the sort of thing that happened. She had read, or heard sung, often enough of men who had spent their lives in pursuit of a goal, a kingdom or a treasure or a truth, and having attained it sat down by the fire and grew old.

She shook her head. Not time for that yet, worse luck! With her baldric she could earn her living, go anywhere — yes, anywhere except home to Celidor, where she was known. And yet she must get home, to see how her children were faring under their uncle's hand.

And how to do it? — "Well, it'll come

Artwork by Jonathan & Lisa Hunt

to me," she muttered, as one said of a difficult rhyme, a verse that would not jell.

Something rattled overhead, loud even through all the noise from below. Overhead, a man was making his way along the narrow walk underneath the clerestory windows, closing the shutters over each window and fastening its latch before going on to the next. As if a great storm were expected — but it was Midsummer's Day, without a cloud in the sky.

Yes, and the great windows that lined the gallery's outer walls had been shuttered too. What in the world was to do?

The last shutter dogged into place, the green-clad workman climbed down the clerestory ladder and set his foot to the gallery floor with a thump. "Evenin'," he muttered.

"Good evening. Tell me, why are the shutters being closed?"

He stared at her. "Say what?"

"The SHUTTERS," she said at full voice. "WHY?"

"It's Midsummer Night," he said, "same as every year," and walked past her toward the kitchen stairs without another word, leaving Mathali to muse, *Hmmm, a deaf man in the Hall of Bards, there's a song in that …*

Below, the bards and guests had risen from table and milled about as the trestles came down. The general conversation had swelled into a roar that drowned out even Lassarina's clear voice, and Mathali saw rather than heard that the woman had actually cornered Mai.

Mathali was the second to win her baldric in months, not years, by challenge and competition. Mai had been the first, ten years before. She had a great mane of coppery hair and a heart-shaped face deceptively sweet; and a voice like a bell, and a wit like a razor. As Mathali watched, Mai deftly turned the bubbling Lassarina in someone else's direction and made her escape. Then she glanced up, caught Mathali's eye, and grinned.

"She means well," Mai said some moments later, as they leaned over the gallery railing together and looked on the merriment below. "She's worked hard to earn all she's won — in spite, as I understand it, of indifferent health."

"Her heart's weak, she said."

"Her fleshly heart, may be," Mai said. "There's nothing wrong with her spirit. If only she never opened her mouth except to sing."

They laughed, and watched the dancers circle 'round the Hall. "It's warm even for Midsummer," Mathali said. "Perhaps you know: Why do they close all the shutters on Midsummer's Night? The workman said he did it every year."

"It's a new custom since I was here ten years ago," Mai said. She steepled her hands, every finger bright with silver rings, and rested her chin on them and frowned.

"That was a misbegotten drab of a year," she mused. "Nobody had ever challenged for her baldric before; I had to go through ice and fire to do it. And there was a suicide that year, as I recall, and then right after Midsummer was when the Master fell ill."

"What like was Master Hreder? I never saw him."

"Tall, fair, handsome enough," Mai said. "A musician of the first rank, with a fine tenor voice. Not so admirable as a man. He had favorites, and he was terribly vain — but you understand, he had something to be vain about.

"And then two days after Midsummer — I was there when it happened — he was coming down those tower stairs with Kleili right behind him, and his knees buckled and he fell. Kleili grabbed his shoulder, but he fell out of her grasp, down to the foot of the stairs. And when they picked him up, his face was as blank as a baby's, and he never spoke again."

"And he's still up there?"

Mai glanced toward the stairs behind the high table, that led up through a blue-tiled archway into the Mistress's tower. "So they say. I've never seen him since. Look, they're opening a new barrel of cider. I'm for another mug. You?"

"Later, thanks." And Mai waved a casual hand (rings glimmered) and

hurried down the stairs. The hum and chatter were dying down below, as the guests turned their attention for the moment from talking to drinking. And there it was again, a howl like a bitter stormwind, the kind that snarls and scratches all 'round the house and tears the shingles off the roof if it can, with a voice in it like the last act of the *Demon Queen*. Ridiculous: she had come to the Hall in time for all the winter weather they had to offer in these parts: rain and snow, yes, and some nasty storms, but nothing that sounded like this — and as she worried it in her mind, she turned toward the head of the gallery. There was one big north window in its far wall, and its heavy shutters had been drawn across it and dogged tight. Storms hereabouts came from the northwest. Mathali unfastened the latches, clenching teeth and eyelids against the expected gale, and opened the shutters — and nothing. A little pale moonlight, the rustle of a few leaves, not even the call of the night birds: peace and quiet, a placid Midsummer's Night. Mathali raised her hands in a bewildered shrug, and the well-balanced shutters softly fell closed again.

Whatever was to do, it couldn't be the weather. Some whim of Mistress Kleili's, maybe? A symbolic act of shutting out the world, like a mourning veil, to commemorate the living death of a well-loved husband? But if Mai had her chronology right, it was still two days from the day Hreder had fallen ill. Perhaps they had quarreled on this day and never made it up before he lost his wits, and she had repented it ever since. *You could make a song of that* — a remark her fellow bards and bard-aspirants made a dozen times a day. It wasn't finding the stuff whereof to make songs and stories; it was putting them together and polishing them till they were fit to hear in public, that meant work. But with a quiet corner in which to mull it over — and this end of the gallery was quiet and remote, with no stair leading to it, no door opening off it, only the shuttered window at the far end.

No, there was a door in that shallow alcove opposite the window: she hadn't seen it at first because it had been whitewashed, wood and ironwork and all, to blend in with the walls. And its latch had been taken off: it must be no longer used. It had a keyhole, though, big and round as Mathali's eye; her brother Didomus could have picked it in a heartbeat. But he wasn't here; so Mathali sat down on its threshold and drew her harp forward into her hands, the bright enamel inlays muted in the dim light, the silver strings faint as cobwebs.

She sat there for some minutes, fingering over soft chords and short melodic lines, turning over phrases in her mind, rejecting or selecting as possibilities to be left to ripen. She had not yet been able to make a song for Corus; maybe a song for Hreder would lead her into it by degrees.

A *real* bard, of course, would be expected to have a plaint for a well-loved patron ready for performance by the morning of the funeral. If she ever acquired a patron, the gods must defend him in good health till Mathali learned that kind of detachment.

Corus was dead and gone to the fire; Hreder, as good as dead in a body that still must be fed and turned and cleaned. Maybe she was fortunate: but her heart turned over at the thought.

Now a voice was rising above the distant murmur in the hall: a clear voice, running on and on like a little brook, oh, by the powers, it was Lassarina, Lassarina on approach up the gallery, with (a quick look around the arch) one of the southern lutenists in tow, looking from side to side for means of escape. He was a courteous man, he wouldn't abandon Lassarina in the middle of her sentence; but if he caught sight of Mathali he'd scrape Lassarina off onto her like a muddy boot scraped across a bootjack, and small blame to him. She shrank back against the whitewashed door with its crude old keyhole. What would Didomus have done? She pulled two pins from her veil and set to the lock. It opened with a scrape and a reluctant click, and she slipped through and pulled it to again.

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Inside, half a dozen steps rose to join a landing where a long staircase paused before continuing its spiral upward out of sight. Mathali took a moment to lay the hall out in her mind's eye — yes, this was the Mistress's tower, that staircase ascended to her private rooms; this door had been shut off perhaps after Hreder fell ill.

And a great and shameful curiosity rose in Mathali, to steal a look at him, the musical champion felled, the brilliant light in eclipse; but what an outrageous act, to go and stare at a man who couldn't stare back —

— *But perhaps it will help in making the song.* And shaking her head at herself, she slung her harp onto her back and began to climb the stairs.

The tower rose two stories above the rest of the hall, with one round room in each. The lower room was the Mistress's study; Mathali had been here twice, to be accepted into the College and to receive her baldric from the Mistress's hands. A pair of lamps, trimmed low, gave just enough light to make one's way by; the wooden paneling glimmered like polished stone and whispered like a soundboard at every step she took. A big floor harp murmured as stray air currents touched its strings. At the far side of the room another staircase led upwards into darkness. She set her foot on the first step, and listened, and stood still.

Sounds: not music, not snoring even, sounds she had been familiar with once. A man's heavy breathing, with little grunts, like one who dances a lively dance; a gasp, and a woman's long sigh .... Oh, heavens. Mathali turned away, face flaming, and sat on the bottom step. Either the Mistress had taken a lover that no one (not even Mai) had ever heard about, or Master Hreder was not quite as dead as reported. Now all was quiet above, and Mathali sat without moving, wondering if she dared rise to steal away, or if she had better give them time to fall asleep. And that would teach her to go exploring other people's bedchambers —!

"*Mmmmmm.* Gods, I'm weak." (The man's voice, clear and resonant.) "Have I been ill?"

"Yes." (Kleili's voice, without a doubt.)

"Those curtains — are they new? How long have I been asleep?"

"A long time. Don't think of it now. Come here."

A long silence. Then the man spoke again:

"What day is it?"

"Midsummer."

"What, again? Have I been asleep a whole year?"

"... Several, actually," Kleili said reluctantly. "Don't worry about it now. Everything will be better now."

"Gods." Over Mathali's head the bedslats creaked. "But I've got to worry about it. Who's been running the College while I've been ill?"

"I have. And we've done very well. We just gave the baldric to fourteen candidates, all of them splendid musicians —"

"Gods. Fourteen? Tonight? I've got to hear them." The bedslats creaked again. "Where's my bedgown? I've got to hear them tonight before they can get away, make sure they're good enough. I mean, my dear girl, you're a fine musician, but you're no administrator. You'd be tempted to give the baldric to anyone, just because he's a good fellow or needs the work so badly. Where *is* my bedgown?"

"In the wardrobe, I imagine." Kleili's voice was heavy with resignation, and something else. "Must you hurry? You've only just wakened, after so many years, and we've had only a few moments together. Must you run downstairs this instant, to seize hold of a College that's been running very well without you?"

"My dear Kleili." There was an edge in his voice. "The reputation of the College is my reputation, and I won't have it marred by slipshod sentiment. I've got to hear those fourteen candidates first, pull their baldrics if I have to. Then I'll start a new series of competitions, masques, pageants, find some new soloists —"

And the wind howled again, louder, closer, angry: and Mathali shivered where she sat. Maybe there was going to be a storm after all. But Hreder said sharply, "What was that?"

"That?" Kleili's voice was smooth as cream. "Why, that's Alma."

A cough. "Alma?"

"*You* remember Alma. She spent her whole five years here scheming her way into your bed: *she* knew how soprano solos were achieved in this College! By the gods, you two deserved each other. Then in her last year you caught sight of somebody else and let her drop again, and on Midsummer's Day you denied her her baldric. Remember?"

"Who told you that?"

"You fool of a tenor, I was there. Do you remember what happened after that? She hanged herself in your stairwell, and every Midsummer she comes back again, knowing you'll be awake again, hoping that *this* time she can make her way to your throat —"

And the howling was growing louder, nearer, and Mathali remembered that she had never fastened those shutters again, just as the heavy panels swung open below and crashed like heavy drumbeats against the wall. The voice of the stormwind resonated in the stairwell like an organ pipe, less like weather now, more like an anguished voice. Something was fumbling at the door.

The door, she had left that unlocked too. It rattled on its hinges, sprang open and slammed back against the alcove wall. A gale wind came pouring up the stairs, hot against the skin, cold in the bone. Sheets of paper flew through the room, books fluttered their pages, dust devils took shape in eddies behind tables, aumbries, the great floor harp. Clutching her harp against her breast with one hand, Mathali beat flying fragments out of her face with the other. Step by uncertain step, cautious of loose things on the floor, she made her way across the chamber to the spiral stairs.

A step downward, another, while the wind whistled in her ears and that damned head-veil whipped about like a battleflag. At the foot of the stairs, backlit by the gallery lamps, something hung in the air.

Paint a woman's face and body on the wind, sculpt it in flowing sand: moments later, it would look like this. The wide mouth, the staring eyes, the rounded breasts were still recognizable, but the arms and legs were flowing away in wisps like the long fair hair. The eddies behind the eyes gathered the torchlight as dewdrops gather sunlight: they shone with a deadly fire. And all the time the wind howled and raged, pouring up the stairwell with blinding speed, but the shape within it drifted upwards slowly as the shadow of a cloud. The wide, distorted mouth was moving, the thin voice rose clear and true above the howling. It *was* the last act of the *Demon Queen*, the glorious death song that only one voice in fifty could sing.

Mathali, too, seemed to be moving slowly, as if underwater: there was time to feel a great pity well up inside her

Artwork by Jonathan & Lisa Hunt

and to think, *Merciful gods, what a waste, a wasted talent, a wasted life — Hreder has a lot to answer for,* all while she raised her arm to shield her eyes and Alma's tattered feet drifted up another step.

She was getting close now, Mathali could have reached out and touched the fingerwisps. Instead she took the harp by its base and held it before her like a shield. All sorts of unchancy things feared silver —

And the windborne thing broke like a cresting wave and fell back upon itself, back down the stairs, leaving something like quiet in its wake. Mathali followed it down as best she could, for her ankles felt weak and her knees wanted to shake. If it had fled outside, if she could slam and bolt the shutters on it again —

The wind hit her like a slap from a giant's hand, and knocked her sprawling along the polished floor in a muddle of pain and fear. She clutched at her scattered wits and discovered that the pain was mostly in her ankle, twisted under as she fell; the fear was for her harp, but it had fallen atop her and should be safe.

She got to her knees, not daring to trust her ankle yet. Alma's shape hung in the air before the open window; a good strong push with the harpstrings might drive her out altogether, but Mathali couldn't muster one at the moment. The fiery eyes were turning this way and that, between the staircase that led to Hreder and the corner where Lassarina crouched beside the trembling lutenist. If Alma would only stay put for a moment, maybe to choose between targets, there might be a chance.

Then the cloudy mass burst open and blew out a wind that knocked Mathali flat again, tore the harp out of her hands and sent it sliding along the floor. It came to the bottom rail, teetered for a moment on the floor's edge, fell into the hall below.

For a moment, Mathali closed her eyes and despaired. Then a clear voice that was certainly not Alma's said, "Oh, turds!" And a moment later something was fumbling at her head. "What is it? Can't you walk? Here, let me fill in." It was Lassarina bending over her, plucking out the bronze veil pins. She tossed the veil over her own head and thrust two pins in at random. "(I'm hoping that thing can't see too good.) Heyo! Wraith! Your top A was flat! Can't catch a flea —" and she danced in place, and set off at a run, the wind-thing roaring and drifting behind her.

Mathali got up cautiously. The pain was receding, her foot was willing to hold her up, just. How long before she could follow the wraith that followed Lassarina 'round the three sides of the gallery? — but she had no weapon: no silver, no garlic, nothing holy.

"Here." An impatient hand turned her round by the shoulder.

"Mai? How'd you get up here?"

"Kleili's stair, it was the closest. It fears silver, right, like all the best ballads?" She was stripping the rings from her fingers as she spoke. "That veil won't deceive it long, it'll be back, maybe you can slap it to death. To something."

Mathali began covering her fingers with rings. Behind Mai, just outside the alcove, stood Hreder, mother-naked, gaping, and Kleili in a frost-white silk robe. Her hand was on his shoulder. Mathali jammed the last ring onto her thumb, a wide band engraved with rose leaves, and turned away. Some-

thing about Hreder was in her mind, but it would have to wait. At the other end of the gallery there was a wild cry, a stumble and a thump. The wraith had turned back, glaring at Mathali across the width of the hall, its wisps and tendrils drifting like foam about a whirlpool. It passed through the railing like a cloud of smoke and drifted toward her. Those in the hall turned frightened faces upward to watch the wraith pass overhead.

Mathali stood still, her arms at her sides, her hands in the folds of her skirts, and watched Alma drift across the hall. Now that her ankle would permit her to run, now she must not run. A little closer. The gale wind blew tendrils of her hair out of the confining braids, whipped them about her face and into her eyes and nose. The distorted mouth sang rage and vengeance. Closer, closer, close enough. She raised her arms and clutched with silvered fingers below the mouth, where the throat might be.

There was *something*. It flexed in her hands like a snake, fluid as a stream of water, but she tightened her grip and hung on. Dragged this way and that, she clung as if to a rope and slowly sank to her knees.

And it was gone. She fell flat to the gallery floor again. The sudden quiet was like going deaf. A few yards away, Kleili stood in her white robe, Hreder fallen at her feet.

"Gods' teeth," Mai said. The copper-haired bard was as pale as milk. "Are you all right? We'd better see to Lassarina."

They walked together 'round the three sides of the gallery. Lassarina lay at the farther end, a crumpled heap of gold and green, the white veil hiding her face.

"Ah, no. Is she dead? Dead of fright?"

Mai's eyes flashed. "Of fright? Never." Gently she turned the body over. Lassarina's face was tranquil, as though she slept. "I've seen men that died of fear; it lingers on their faces. No, it was her fleshly heart that gave way, too feeble to keep pace with her spirit.

"No matter." Mai got to her feet. "I'll make a song for her, and her name will outlive us all."

Mathali's eyes stung. She bent to retrieve the silken veil and the bronze pins, which she would have good reason now to keep. The simplest disguise — and the word *disguise* began to ring in her head like a great bell. "Mai? Where do they know most about disguises?"

"Theatrical paint, or magic?"

"Either. Both."

"Plenty of makeup artists on Theatre Street in Pittiwig, only fifty miles from here. You might find a few mages too, in the special-effects houses."

"Very good." She pulled another ring from another finger. Now she knew how she would return to Celidor. Tugging absently at the wide ring on her thumb, she raised her eyes and looked down into the hall. There sat Finjar with her harp, running his fingers happily over the strings; he must have caught it as it fell. And above, at the other end of the gallery, stood Kleili with tears trickling down her face, like the final tableau of the *Demon Queen*, while men lifted Hreder's unconscious body onto a stretcher.

Kleili grabbed his shoulder, and he fell, and never spoke again. That wasn't how Mai had told it, but she'd bet that was how it had happened. *And every Midsummer you'll be awake again* — Kleili had done this of her own will, by poison, magic, or leechcraft, silencing her husband for the sake of the College and its students — and for her own pride. She looked up sharply and caught Mathali's eye. Her lips narrowed.

Mathali shook her head "no." *I'll never tell if you don't.* And Kleili turned away, to follow Hreder up the stairs.

Mathali realized she was still pulling at the ring on her thumb. It fit loosely enough where it lay, but she couldn't get it up over the joint. "I'm sorry. Maybe if I got some soap —?"

"No, keep it, I make you a gift of it," Mai said. "I suspect you've earned it. Either that, or you're going to need it. Now we'd better go downstairs: you need to get your harp back from Finjar before he makes it an offer of marriage, and I want just one more cider. Then I've got to get to work."

In the morning, under the mild sunlight, Mathali packed her saddlebags and rode away, her harp on her back, her cat on her saddlebow. From a window of the Hall she heard Mai singing:

"So raise your glasses high, me lads,
The candles set aflame,
And honour well the memory
Of Lassarina's name ...."

❄

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Whistle the Wind

by Cynthia McQuillin

"Raggedy Man! Raggedy Man!" the children cried as they saw Jager Whitlowe striding up the winding path to Bowerton village. He stopped to wave and grin, tipping his dusty wide-brimmed hat, then continued pushing his cart up the rutted track. As he passed by, the children fell into step behind him. Clumsy and eager as puppies, they followed him into the town square where he customarily set up his trade.

Jager was a tall man, gaunt and straw-colored as a scarecrow, and just as ragged. He winked and grinned at the children as they clustered around him, snatching at the pack he carried and the packages he unwrapped, each one trying to help the old peddler as he set up his display. Jager enjoyed their youthful fussing and teasing after the solitude of his long journey, but he said nothing, deliberately feeding their anticipation with his silence.

"What have you brought this time?" demanded a chubby, raven-haired lad named Colyn.

"Show us your wares, Raggedy Man!" chorused a pair of girls alike enough to be twins.

It was always the same, no matter where he went. First the children came. They loved him best and understood him, a little. Then the good-wives would appear one by one to examine the treasures he displayed. They were diffident and disdainful even though they needed what he brought. Finally, near the end of the day, the men folk would come to test the tools and cutlery he made.

They haggled over every penny spent, watching Jager with hard, wary eyes. Though the good people of Bowerton trusted him with their children, they still feared he might cheat them. He was a tinker, after all, and an outsider. Jager encouraged that attitude, deliberately keeping himself apart even when overtures were made.

He finished arranging his goods and hunkered down on the stool he had set out beside the cart. There he sat, looking up the square as though patiently watching for a customer to appear, but the children weren't fooled. They knew he was only waiting for their invitation to take out the penny whistle he kept tucked in his tunic pocket. After a moment of watching, they gathered into a circle, glancing at Jager as they spoke. When their conference was ended, the oldest — a girl named Della — was pushed forward. She was slender and long of limb with black hair and stormy blue eyes. Smiling prettily at Jager, she stepped closer as the other children seated themselves on the ground in a expectant semi-circle around him.

"Please," Della said. "Whistle us a tune, Raggedy Man."

"So, you wish me to take time out of my busy day to play you a song, do you?" The children all laughed at his stern expression. "Have you no chores? Wickedness comes of sloth!"

"Work may nurture the body, but music nurtures the soul," Della replied.

"Give me back my own words, will you? That was clever, girl. Very well, I'm caught," he laughed. "What do you want to hear?"

Face flushed with pleasure at having bested him at the game, she tilted her head thoughtfully as she considered. She had grown much since his visit last year, Jager noted. He had been right to return just now. *Soon she will be too old for games.* That thought saddened the old man. With her quickness of mind and straightforward manner, the girl reminded him very much of her great grandmother, his own dear half-sister Mari.

"Come now, Della, name the tune. Or," he leaned forward to ask in a conspiratorial tone, "do you wish me to guess?"

"Oh yes, please!" her eyes sparkled. That too was a game, pretending to

read her thoughts. But it was really the longing in her heart he heard.

Cocking his head to one side, Jager placed the whistle to his lips and blew softly. A stream of silvery notes poured forth, cascading like spring rain over their young ears as his fingers danced jauntily up and down its slender body.

"Oh, Raggedy Man!" Della gasped. "You play as sweetly as elf-song. The Queen of Earth and Air herself would steal you away to her realm if ever she heard you play."

"I hope not, indeed!" Jager said in mock dismay as he lowered the whistle from his lips, but there was a bitter line to the set of his mouth. Then his gray eyes sparkled suddenly, and his face seemed to crack into a mask of dusty spider webs with his laughter.

"What use would an old tinker have for elf-kin airs and leisure?" The other children laughed at that.

"But to hear them play," Della insisted, eyes bright with wanting. Jager's eyes narrowed and his mouth hardened as he looked at her radiant expression.

"Della and the elf-kin! Della and elf-kin!" called Colyn.

The other children were quick to take up his chant, but they quieted as Colyn's mother approached, carrying a pot that needed mending. She cuffed her son lightly on the ear and sent him back to his chores.

"Never mind," Jager whispered to Della as she too turned to go. "They are young, and do not understand about the magic that music can hold."

"I have to go," she said with a resigned little shrug. "Mother will be cross if I don't finish my spinning."

"Return when you can," Jager said, an anxious look momentarily clouding his bright, birdlike eyes.

"When I can," she echoed, at once flattered and surprised by the invitation. He had never shown a particular interest in any of the children before.

Jager sat hunched over a small kettle, sprinkling herbs and seasonings into a concoction of water, dried meat and some wild tubers he'd pulled earlier that day. The afternoon had brought him several sales, and two pots, a hoe, and a plow blade to mend as well as several knives to sharpen. It would be two or three days' work easily. Jager was pleased that his timing had brought him back to Bowerton just when he planned, *and* that he had a reason to linger.

Mid-Summer was a dangerous time even in such modern days, and he would normally have been far away these were haunted hills by now, but he had seen something in Della on his last visit that told him she possessed one of the second-senses, just as he did. He feared her gift had already wakened, leaving the girl vulnerable to the supernatural forces the summer festival would set free.

The crunch of a nearby footfall alerted Jager to Della's approach. He looked up to see her pause just outside the invisible circle he had laid to ward his camp against spirits and unnatural beings. Seeing this Jager knew he had been right, and wondered how Della's gift had manifested itself — sight, hearing or touch.

"I finished early," Della called as she approached his cook-fire.

"Do sit down, girl." He gestured to the end of the log he was using for a seat. "You'll give this poor old man a stiff neck from staring up at you."

"Are you really so old, Raggedy Man?" She gave him a strangely penetrating look as she joined him on the log. "It's hard to tell under all the dust and dirt, but you don't move like an old man. Certainly not like the old men in the village. And yet, it seems as if you have been coming to Bowerton forever. My grandfather speaks of your coming even when he was a young man. Or was that your father perhaps?"

"I *am* old enough to have known your grandfather, Della, so perhaps I did. It becomes harder to remember as the years go by." Jager gave her a thoughtful smile. "But you didn't come to speak about my age, did you?"

"No," she admitted with an embar-

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

rassed laugh. "I came to hear you play. Would you mind?"

"Not if it pleases you," he said, drawing the whistle from his pocket.

She closed her eyes to concentrate on the movement of the music as he played, and pleaded for more when he was done.

"Would you like me to show you something special, Della?" he asked after a while. "Something secret."

"What is it?" Her eyes widened in anticipation. "Magic?"

"After a fashion," he said. "But I can only show you if you swear not to tell anyone."

"Oh, Raggedy Man, I swear. Of course I swear," she laughed.

"No, Della, I mean it. This must be a secret, just between the two of us." His expression was deadly serious, and she nodded gravely.

This time when he placed the whistle to his lips, Jager blew a curious dissonant series of tones with an oddly disjointed cadence. Della's heart leaped as the notes skittered from the instrument, and tiny dust devils whirled up from the dirt around them, dancing and spinning to the sound of the penny whistle.

"How do you do that?" she demanded as the tiny whirlwinds collapsed once more to the ground when he stopped.

"I am a *whistler*," he said.

"There are no *whistlers*," Della scoffed. "That's just an old wives' tale, like the pond-wights."

"Or like the elf-kin?"

"That's different." She glowered at him.

"No one believes the old tales anymore, but that does not make them untrue, Della. The elf-kin are real, though their presence in the world has faded over the years, and once there *were* pond-wights who rescued drowning children from stagnant pools in the deep forest."

Her certainty wavered. She wanted to believe him, but she was afraid to at the same time.

"Oh, stop it!" she demanded with an indignant look. "You're playing another game. I thought you were different, but you're just like the others after all."

"No, Della," he softly said. "I am not like the others, anymore than you are."

"No, I suppose you aren't." Again she gave him that thoughtful piercing look.

"I see and hear things that other people do not," Jager's voice softened, "and I think that you do, too."

"Well, if I *did* hear and see things like that, it would bring me no good," she said. "I mean, it's all right for an old Raggedy Man like you to tell wild tales and hear music in the woods. You come and go, and no one cares, but my life is here and I must stay. If I'm strange, everyone will shun me and call me fey, or stone me for a witch.

"Oh, why am I telling you this?" She gave him a haunted look. "I don't even know who you are, anymore."

"My name is Jager Whitlowe. I was born in Keller's Bend one hundred and fifty-two years ago, and I have outlived everyone I have ever loved. And you are telling me these things, because you need to share them with someone else who understands."

For a moment it seemed that his words had moved her, but then a woman's voice called her name in the distance, and she jumped to her feet as though freed from a spell.

"Wait, Della," he cried, reaching out to catch her arm. "Tomorrow is Mid-Summer and there are things I must tell you. There is danger!"

Startled by his urgency and the strength of his grip, she pulled free of his grasp and ran towards the village.

The Solstice fire flared high in the stone-lined pit that stood before the Earth Shrine. The ancient stone altar was more a boundary marker than a religious monument these days, though, separating the cultivated fields from the dwindling woodlands. Jager approached the garlanded festival site quietly, watching the raucous celebration, which was a gross parody of the original ritual, with sad tolerance as he stood just outside the circle of light.

Scanning the crowd, he spotted her on the other side of the fire with the group of children playing run-sheep-run. He had tried to speak with her earlier in the day, but she managed to evade him, remaining with her mother as she made festival preparations with the rest of the good-wives. Now he had no alternative but to watch the girl and hope he could avert any threat before it was too late.

"Come play for us, Raggedy Man!" young Brandis Krieger cried as he threw a companionable arm around Jager's shoulder, drawing him into the circle. Though he tried to escape, the tinker soon found himself surrounded by a crowd of drunken cheering people.

"Give us a tune so we can dance!" cried a chorus of youthful voices.

"Play, Raggedy Man, play!" the crowd took up the chant.

With a helpless shake of his head, Jager took a seat with the makeshift band that had assembled to one side of the fire pit. Taking a long swig of sour ale, he took out his whistle and joined the others, keeping his eyes on Della as he played. One tune followed another as couples and groups whirled about the blazing fire, creating a tapestry of flushed faces and brightly decorated fabric, and Jager found it harder and harder to keep track of one girl among the throng.

Nearly lost to the thrall of the music he played, he was jarred back to reality by something vaguely discordant pricking at the edge of his consciousness as the song neared its end. When the music stopped, he heard the distant icy tones of harp-song and pipe played beyond mortal skill echo from the depths of the woods. Sick with sudden fear, Jager realized that the girl he thought was Della was her cousin Hilde. Staggering to his feet, he scanned the crowd for any sign of her, but she was nowhere to be found.

Jager stepped abruptly down from the platform and pushed his way through the crowd to the edge of the woods, heedless of the questioning cries that followed him.

That other-worldly music was louder now, clawing at the edge of his senses like a note played slightly off true. The balance of the worlds had shifted and the Folk of Earth and Air, as they were called in the old ballads, were stirring from their prison of time. Old they were and weakened by the years, but still treacherous and deadly. Jager cocked his head, concentrating until he caught the thread of melody once more.

"Della," Jager whispered.

No doubt, she had heard the elf-song too, and followed it into the woods. What a fool he had been to think he could stop her! The grace and intricacy of the ghostly strains haunted and mocked him, its melody insidiously sweet, and as poisonous as rhododendron honey. Fear for Della quickened his step.

He came upon the eerily lit circle of the elf-clearing very suddenly, but he knew that was only illusion. The elf-kin cast a glamour about their sacred

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

ground, so that it remained invisible from the outside. Only those the Queen of Earth and Air chose to summon were allowed to enter their charmed world.

Jager paused for a moment, steeling himself for what must follow, then he stepped deliberately into the glade. The moon had barely risen and the portal was still small, encompassing only that starlit clearing with its glowing ground.

"Oh, Raggedy Man, isn't it splendid?" Della called as she caught sight of him.

She sat on her heels beside a chair of carved ebony set with diamonds and inscribed with silver runes. Amid these quicksilver creatures of air and shadow, she seemed graceless and out of place

— dressed as she was in rough homespun and fresh-faced as a flower.

The Queen of Earth and Air sat upon her throne, robed in a diaphanous shimmering gown of pale green, which revealed the creamy curves of the flesh beneath. Beautiful in her strangeness, she rose to greet Jager with familiar contempt.

"So, peddler, you have returned to us at last." Her voice was like harpsong, or like the wind singing in the tree tops, for all the venom of her tone. "Come sit beside me and we will talk awhile, as old friends should."

A chair was brought forward and Jager took his place unwillingly at the Elf Queen's side. He met her gaze with a grim smile, his eyes cold and empty as hers, his expression just as deadly. She was exactly as he remembered her, stiff-backed and proud, raven's-wing hair flowing down like a silken river. Her eyes were night-dark pools with a single star caught in each, and her lips were as red as blood, bright contrast to her skin, which was as white and smooth as polished bone.

Those crimson lips parted ever so slightly as she regarded him, and Jager was lost for a moment in the memory of their taste and texture upon his own. But he knew the falseness of their promise, just as he knew her human-seeming for mere illusion.

Leaning towards him, she murmured, "You must be thirsty after such a hasty journey, old friend. Will you not drink with me to the turning of the year?"

"As you wish," he said, lowering his eyes to glance covertly around the glade.

She whispered something to Della, who giggled then rose to fetch a cup of wine and a plate of food from the table that stood to one side. Every manner of wondrous food and drink seemed to be set upon that table, which was a marvel, for the table itself was not large. Trying to imitate the elf-kin, Della was laughably clumsy, knocking one of the goblets into a pudding.

"Thank you," Jager said, taking the cup when she brought it to him. Noting the Elf Queen's attention was momentarily diverted by the antics of two of the dancers, he caught Della's arm and whispered, "Have you drunk the wine, girl, or told her your name?" She shook her head, giving him a disconcerted look.

"Good, then don't!"

"As you wish." But her tone was somewhat distracted, her gaze returning immediately to the Elf Queen when he released his hold on her. The Queen of Earth and Air reached down to stroke Della's head, as the girl settled once more beside her throne. Jager's blood chilled as Della beamed up at her with a expression of rapt adoration, but he said nothing.

Raising the silver cup to his lips, he drank deeply, then set it down. The wine was blood-dark red, as thick and heady as he recalled. *And every bit as bitter in its promise,* he regretfully thought as he settled back to bide his time.

Ignoring the swirl of glittering draperies, Jager fixed his eyes on Della's face as the elf-kin moved swiftly through the sinuous stream of their dance. It was similar to, but far more complex than, the dances danced in the village. Jager looked away when the Elf Queen smiled at him, once more stroking her prize with pale possessive fingers.

"You do not dance anymore?" she asked, her voice at once lulling and enticing. "But you always loved so to dance."

"Too much work for me these days," he answered simply.

"Ah, I see. The long days of walking have worn you out?" He looked to see her lips turn upwards in a thoughtful smile which revealed the tips of her needle-sharp teeth. "But surely the child is young and strong. She would like to dance, I think."

"Oh, yes please! May I?" Della sprang to her feet.

"But of course you may." The Queen smiled indulgently. As she spoke a tall dark-haired man of unnatural beauty appeared at Della's side, to sweep her into the flow of the dance.

"Never fear, dear friend. He will be gentle with your little spinning maid, and she will have a night to remember," the Elf Queen smiled at Jager's frown.

A barely audible moan inadvertently escaped him as he recalled his first night with elf-kin, the tingle of her mouth as it covered the pulse of his throat, drawing out part of his soul with the blood she took.

He looked up in time to see Della whirled away from the other dancers and into the dark of the trees by her partner. But when he would have risen to follow, the Queen's soft voice detained him.

"Let them be. No harm will come to her, you have my word. But tell me, do you still bear my gift?" Jager's hand went to his breast before he could think to stop it.

"Good." She smiled. "Then you must play for us. We have missed the sweetness of your skill."

Glancing once more in the direction that Della had gone, he rose to take his place with the other musicians. But instead of reaching into his pocket for the penny whistle, he brought out a pouch from inside his shirt. The bag was made of fine black material embroidered in silver threads and bore the same runes that adorned the queen's throne, but in miniature.

The exquisitely carved whistle he drew from its folds was about the length of his middle finger and the creamy white of polished bone. With a sigh, he raised it to lips and began to play.

Della returned alone to the clearing halfway through the second song. Looking pale, but elated, she took her place at the Elf Queen's feet. Jager could not help but note the red mark on her throat and knew that her elf-kin lover had initiated her into their dark ways. This was the first step in her claiming. Jager had passed the first two initiations, but had escaped before their queen had seduced away his soul completely.

"Come, walk with me in the wood, dear Tinker, and let us talk of old times," the Elf Queen said as the second song ended.

The air had grown chill and dark, as it did just before the dawn. If she were to seduce him to the final sacrament, she must do it before sunrise or keep him for the entire year before she could try again. Jager had learned this, and many other unpleasant things, in the year he had spent with the Folk of Earth and Air when she had first caught him in her web. If only he could hold her off till dawn, he might at least win Della free.

"One more song," he pleaded, "then we shall do as you say, Gracious Lady. I had forgotten the joys of such music."

"Very well, but only one," she said, willing to be patient now that her creature had marked Della. She knew that Jager would not leave without the girl.

Raising the whistle to his lips he set a merry pace for the dancers, insinuating his will into the web of melody he wove, imperceptibly at first, then more

forcefully as the elf-kin were drawn into the flow of the sound. In his mind's eye, the scene in the clearing crystallized, the queen and her court captured like so many beautiful insects in amber.

Slower he played and slower, until at last the dancers stilled, completely entranced as the sky began to pearl with false dawn. The other musicians had stopped playing, as well. Only the shrill, unearthly keening of Jager's bone whistle stirred that enchanted space. Sensing her danger at last, the Elf Queen spoke in his mind.

The girl has chosen to stay of her own free will. But I will send her away if you will take her place, dear tinker. It was always you I sought to draw.

Jager refused to answer, turning all of his attention to making his will reality.

Did you never love me, faithless man? Her mental tone was softer now, infinitely sad and forgiving at the same time. *I have always kept my pledge. It was you who betrayed me. But I have forgiven you long since, and would make you a prince among our kind.*

Della, Jager touched her mind as he sensed the first morning wind freshen the darkness outside the charmed stillness of the circle. *Come to me, Della.*

"What?" she murmured, stirring sluggishly from her rapturous dream as he fractured the crystal of his spell ever so slightly to allow her to escape.

Della, come to me. Now! The notes he played grew strident, cutting through her reverie, and she rose awkwardly to her feet.

"Sweeting, do not leave me," the Elf Queen called as Della moved forward, partially freed from the spell by proximity. Her voice was both piteous and sweet as she reached out a slender hand to draw the girl back. "Stay and I shall grant your heart's desire."

But she was too late. Step by step Della came to Jager's side, and with each step her eyes grew clearer, until she was able to focus on his worn familiar features, blocking out all the rest.

Thank the Gods! he exalted as she finally reached his side, to stand trembling from the effort.

The elf-kin and all their trappings grew pale and insubstantial as the sky slowly lightened. Heartened by the nearness of dawn, Jager changed his tune abruptly. Forcefully as he could, he blew a weird discordant dirge like a tempest brewing. Faster he played and faster, till the winds swirled madly, battering the barrier of time that held the clearing outside earthly bounds. With his final piercing crescendo the storm whipped the ancient trees so hard that their branches cracked and the edge of the circle shimmered with the fury of it.

Run, Della! Run! Jager screamed in her mind. Time and space dissolved around them, splitting the universe momentarily asunder as the world-door slowly collapsed beneath the power of his magical wind. But Della would not leave him, pulling the old man with her as she fought her way from the clearing. Jager had thought to stay till the end, making sure that the portal was sealed for all and good, though he would have perished in the sealing. Instead he found himself falling free onto the forest floor, the whistle knocked away from his ragged lips.

Without his playing to sustain it, the wind subsided until all that remained was the gentle sigh of the morning breeze. Exhausted, Jager lay on the ground, just grateful to be alive. He heard Della moan, and heaved himself up to find the girl staring at the now-empty clearing with tired, anguished eyes. Her braids were undone and her hair hung in dark tangles over her torn and dirty clothing.

"They were so beautiful," she murmured.

"And so inhuman," Jager said, stroking a tear from her cheek with the back of his fingers. "It is better to be human and live free."

"I suppose," she said with a sigh, looking more her old self. "But tell me this. Why did you drink from the cup when you told me not to?"

"To become what they are, there are three things you must do. Allowing them to taste of your life, is the least, though this does give them some power over you," he said, lightly touching the wound on her throat.

Della blushed, but said nothing.

"To drink of their wine is the next. This will make you as timeless as they, for it is laced with the blood of the folk. To give them your name is the most damning, for in that you give them your soul. I had already submitted myself to the Elf Queen's kiss and drunk their wine. I could hardly be twice damned on that account. But she could never own my soul because I was never foolish enough to give her my name."

Della was silent for a long moment, then she asked, "Did the wind-magic come from the bone whistle?"

"Only in part," he said softly, examining the tiny whistle. "The ability to whistle the wind was always mine. I

Artwork by Michael Kucharski

was born a *whistler*, like my grandfather before me. But it is a small magic, good for parlor tricks like the dust devils I called for you, and calming or raising small winds — which is a good trick for a sailor but of little use to a tinker.

"Had the Elf Queen known what I truly was, she would never have gifted me with this," he said. Giving the bone whistle one last look, he put it carefully away. "I have chosen not to use it, until now."

"Thank you," Della said. "I think I understand, but what will happen now?"

"I have closed the gate, for now, but you should not stay here. When the star wheel turns round in its course, the world-gate will open again, and you may not be strong enough to resist their call."

"Then I will go with you, Raggedy Man," she said.

"What would your mother say to that?" he snorted. "I'd be hanged for a kidnapper or worse."

"I am fifteen this month," she said, looking far older than her years. "That's old enough to choose with whom I would go." Her tone softened then as she added, "It's a very hard thing after all to be alone with such a strange gift, and I don't want to live and die without knowing who I am."

"Are you sure?" he asked, suddenly feeling shy.

"Yes," she said, no hint of doubt clouding her deep blue eyes. "Come, I will tell mother that I have chosen. She may not be as surprised at my choice as you think." She smiled, taking his long, thin fingers in hers as they started back towards the village. "After all, she chose to walk her own path as well, refusing ever to take a husband though she might have had any man in the village."

❄

CYNTHIA MCQUILLIN lives in an old Victorian house in Berkeley, CA, with Dr. Jane Robinson (her partner in the music/comedy duet Mid-Life Crisis) and three cats. She is currently trying to sell her first novel — a fantasy about a street-singer turned psychic healer — and working on her second, a vampire novel.

MICHAEL KUCHARSKI lives hear Detroit and has worked as a professional illustrator and graphic artist in the advertising and journalism fields for nearly two decades.

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The Good Witch

by Blake Linton

Sheila Marsh was reviewing patient records in her office when the intercom buzzed. It was the receptionist:

"Dr. Marsh, there's a Mr. Lucifer here to see you."

Sheila sighed. "Send him in and hold all calls."

A tall red figure in a business suit entered. He removed his hat and sunglasses to reveal small horns and glowing eyes.

The Prince of Darkness leaned over Sheila's desk menacingly. *"What the blazes do you think you're doing?"* he bellowed.

"I'm the president and CEO of Marsh Rehabilitation, Inc.," Sheila answered calmly. "I use the 'spell of hatred' you gave me to make addicts hate the drugs to which they're addicted. The profits go to charity."

"You can't do that!" the devil cried. "You're a witch. You're supposed to wear a pointy hat, fly around on a broomstick, and *be evil*!"

"Get real. This is the 20th century. Besides, our contract doesn't stipulate *any* of those things," Sheila retorted.

The Devil grunted and pulled a document from his breast pocket. "The contract we signed *does* clearly state that in exchange for the continuing use of one spell, you agree to wreak unhappiness and discontent!"

Sheila removed a file folder from a desk drawer and waved it before Satan's nose. "Here are the names and phone numbers of all the physicians and clinics that cared for my patients before they came to Marsh Rehabilitation. I can assure you, I am making everyone on this list unhappy! They've lost a fortune. And the drug lords and pushers are becoming more discontented by the minute."

Satan turned a darker shade of red and returned the contract to his pocket. His next words were ominously quiet and controlled: "You think you're clever, don't you? I can't go back on my contract, but I can change *which* spell I let you use. I hereby retract the 'spell of hatred' and give you the 'spell of sickness'. The words of the spell are 'illaroth avagore'." He smiled fiendishly. "Just *try* thinking of a way to use *that* for good deeds!"

The Devil donned his sunglasses and hat. He left, whistling a melody from *Faust*.

* * *

Sheila Marsh was examining financial statements in her office when the intercom buzzed. It was the receptionist:

"Dr. Marsh, there's a Mr. Beelzebub here to see you. I — I think he's a singing telegram or something."

Sheila sighed. "Send him in and hold all calls."

The Prince of Darkness entered and angrily slammed the door behind him. He had dispensed with disguises: the horns, glowing eyes, and forked tail were all plainly visible. He pounded a taloned fist on Sheila's desk. "*What are you doing this time?*"

"I'm the president and CEO of Marsh Miracle Cures, Inc.," Sheila answered calmly. "I use the 'spell of sickness' you gave me to make my patients' viruses and bacteria sick. This enables my patients' own immune systems to overcome infections. The technique is similar to the use of antibiotics, but much more effective."

Satan scowled. "No doubt the profits go to charity," he said sarcastically. "No doubt the patients' prior physicians are unhappy. And no doubt several major manufacturers of antibiotics are becoming more discontented by the minute."

Sheila nodded. "Good for you! You're learning!" she said brightly.

"You *are* clever, Sheila," admitted the Prince of Darkness. "But not clever enough. I hereby retract the 'spell of sickness' and give you the 'spell of toadmaking'. The words of the spell are 'bufonis sacaru'." The Devil smiled devilishly. "All you can do now is turn things into toads. I'll wager you can't think of a way to use *that* spell to do good deeds!"

"No problem," said Sheila, rising from her chair and pointing a finger at Satan. "Bufonis sacaru!"

Poof! Satan became an unhappy and discontented toad.

A horned toad, of course.

❄

Blake Linton earned a degree in Computer Science and spent seven years as a NASA computer consultant before realizing that writing is more fun than programming. "The Good Witch" is his first sale.

Barb Armata has illustrated for many magazines, most often for these pages.

Artwork by James Balkovek

If Father had simply ignored him I might never have listened to the man who came to us that hot summer day so many years ago. But it is impossible for any boy in his young teens to ignore someone who provokes his father to violence for no apparent reason, especially when his father refuses to talk about it afterward.

It was the middle of August and the day sweltered. Even the normally cool breeze off the lake was steamy, and the sweat stayed slick and clammy on our skin as we worked the forge — me at the bellows and Father at the open furnace. The acrid smell of coke bit at my nose and coated my lips and tongue, leaving a sharp taste in my mouth that the years had taught me to like.

We had been commissioned to make a new plowshare, and we would need to be at the forge all day and into the night to heat the wide flat piece of iron to temper and form it. Though Father thought I was unaware of such things, I knew this job was unusual. We were using new metal, virgin iron that had never been forged. No one used virgin iron for a mere plowshare unless the metal was to be enchanted, blessed with the magic so few really believed in.

Father believed in it, and he used it. That's why we had this job; he could infuse the metal with power that would make the plow cut sharper and deeper. He could make the soil touched by that plow be more fruitful. I had no idea what else he might be able to do — he refused to talk to me about magic and pretended it didn't exist.

It was a little past noon when the air changed. Instead of the bitter taste of coke from the forge I noticed a rich, loamy scent like the smell of earth freshly turned on a wet spring morning. It was a smell that spoke of fertile soil and the promise of a bounteous harvest. It was the smell of magic.

I raised the bellows and pushed down, then looked up at Father. "Are you doing it?"

"Doing what?"

"Are you putting the magic into the metal?"

He flicked a glance at me and the earthy smell vanished, to be replaced with mere coke from the forge. "What

THERE IS A SEASON

BY SCOTT R. PARKIN

magic? I don't know anything about magic, and neither do you."

I slowly raised the handle. "Do you think I couldn't smell it?" I pushed down firmly on the bellows. "You were enchanting this plowshare. What will it do?"

He turned the metal over in the fire but did not look up. "Foolishness. Do not bother me with fairy stories you know nothing about."

"Do you think I can't understand?"

Father kept his head down and said nothing; I kept pumping the bellows. I had asked him dozens of times, and every time he told me it was all a fantasy. Sometimes I wanted to shout and tell him that if he would only talk to me I would stop asking the same questions. But he never talked, and I knew it would do no good to try to force it out of him. So I let it go again and silently pumped the bellows while the sweat ran down my face and back.

Summer was the only time of the year when I truly resented the trade Father had taught me. A smith — *schmied* as Father said in the old language — was an honorable profession that was always needed. Unfortunately, it seemed that people only needed our service at the hottest times of the year. No one ever asked for a plowshare in the cold of winter when struggling at the forge was a good way to keep warm.

I felt the stranger coming long before I looked up. It started as a gentle easing of the heat and grew into an active chill that startled both Father and me and made us look for the source of this blessed breeze. I noticed the scent of juicy, ripe melon and my mouth watered.

He walked slowly, deliberately, up the dusty path that led to the house. He was bundled in thick coat and britches, fur draped over his shoulders, and his feet lost in heavy boots that came up nearly to his knees. He trudged as if through snow, his pace was so slow and agonized. I looked up at Father to see if he saw it too, or if it was an illusion born of too much work and too much heat.

Father stared at the man for a long moment, and I saw recognition on his face. He stood silently and watched the visitor approach; the stranger stopped twenty feet away. "Hello, Fridjof. It's been a long time," the man said in a smooth, deep voice.

"Why are you here?" Father asked.

"I'm doing what I am called to do."

Father shook his head. "This is a simple enchantment to make a plowshare more useful. There is no need for you here."

"That is not what I have come to do."

"Then why —" Father glanced over at me and I saw fear in his eyes. He stepped out from behind the open forge and stood between me and the stranger.

"No," Father said in a low voice. "There is nothing for you here."

The stranger shook his head. "That is not a choice you can make, Fridjof. You know that." He looked at me with icy blue eyes that seemed almost white in the bright August sun. "Only one person can decide that."

Father held his arms out as if to keep the stranger away — or hold me back. "Leave my family alone. We've already paid enough."

The stranger held his hand out to me. "Come and learn all the things he will not tell you. Learn about the magic."

I started. "How do you know what Father has told me and what he hasn't?"

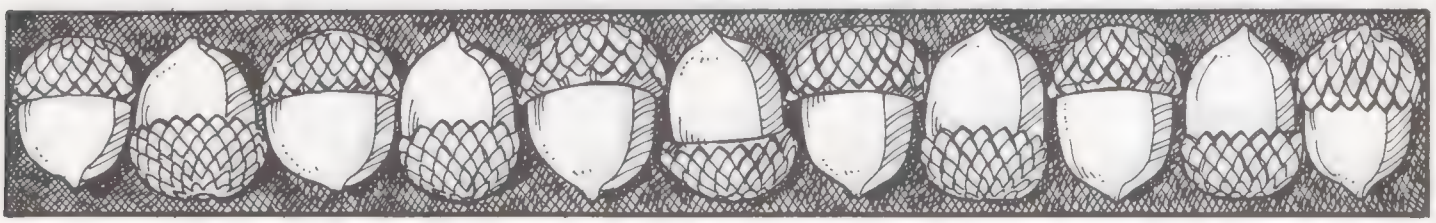
He smiled. "I know a great many things, Franz — yes, even your name. I also know how much you want to learn about the magic. I will teach you."

It was as if he were casting a spell on me. When the stranger spoke I felt the strength of his power, the depth of his knowledge. I looked over at Father. "I want to learn it from you. Will you tell me?"

Father shook his head once, a quick sideways jerk as though against his will. "I can't," he whispered.

I let go of the smooth wooden handle of the bellows and stepped toward him. "I've asked you dozens of times. If you won't tell me, I'll learn it from him." I stepped out into the bright sun and moved toward the stranger.

Father reached up and snatched a newly sharpened hand scythe from the heavy wooden beam that ran along the edge of the roof. He whirled on the stranger and held it up, the worn blade black against the bright sun.



Artwork by James Balkovek

"*Hau ab. Weg!*" he shouted at the strange man. "Go away! Leave my family alone." The stranger just shook his head and took a step forward.

Father screamed and charged the man, raising the scythe above his head. Before I could shout, Father swung and the blade sliced through layers of clothing and skins and thudded against the flesh of the stranger's arm. For his part, the man stood quietly, apparently unconcerned. Father wrenched the blade free and swung again at his leg, then again and again as I stood, frozen by shock. Blood stained the blade and spattered the tatters of the man's clothing, and still Father swung the blade.

"Stop!" I finally shouted. "You're killing him!"

Father looked up at me, his face flushed with anger and effort. "If only I could," he muttered with a hoarse voice, then turned back and raised the scythe.

"No!" I screamed and grabbed his arm.

He pushed me away. "Go back into the house. This man is not for you to see, not for you to know. Go!"

I grabbed his arm, and he turned on me. "Do not argue with me, *Junge*. Go to your mother; go where it is safe."

I reached for the scythe in his hand. "Stop it. Are you crazy?"

He shoved me so hard I sprawled backward in the dirt. He stood over me, his face mottled red and purple, his eyes seeming to bulge from his head. "Get in the house or I'll beat you until you wish you were dead. Go!"

I scrambled backward and stood up. Though he had never raised a hand against me in all my life, I believed him. Father had changed, had transformed from a man of peace and reason to a raging monster with murder in his heart.

Father turned back, but the stranger had already started to shamble down the road, away from Father and his scythe, away from the violence he met here. I wanted to run after, but I dared not. And while I was glad he escaped my father's attack, I felt cheated that he left without more of a fight, that he left me behind.

"Do not come back, Wolf," Father shouted at his retreating back. "I know more painful ways of hurting you than this. Believe me when I say I will use them."

The strange man seemed to shake his head as he walked. But instead of the slow, labored pace he had taken on the way up the lane, his gait now seemed almost sprightly. And though I had watched Father strike him a half-dozen solid blows on the legs and had seen the blood stain both the blade and his clothing, the man walked smoothly, his steps sure and strong, his pace lively.

Father and I watched him until he reached the end of the long lane that led to our house. He turned the corner and disappeared behind the hedge, and the heat rushed in from all sides to engulf us in its terrible grip. I blinked against the sudden vehemence of the heat and, for just a moment, wondered if the whole thing had been a dream brought on by the impossible heat.

Then Father turned, the scythe still in his hand, the curved blade shining with quickly drying blood. He dropped it in the yellow dirt and looked up at me. Our eyes met for only a moment, and he said, "I had to do it. For you."

I shook my head. "Why?"

He stood silent, as he had so many times before, and I turned away and ran into the house. As the front door closed, I heard him say, "I can't tell you. Even if I wanted to."

I lay in bed and stared at the ceiling. Smooth, even slats of wood fit together so tightly there was no need for plaster. It was one of the many things Father knew that made our house a little nicer, a little easier to live in than those of my friends. He was a master blacksmith, but also an accomplished carpenter, mason, and farmer. It was as if he knew something about everything.

I was nearly ten before I realized that. It was only when I watched my friends' fathers that I understood how different mine was. Their fathers could only do a few things well, knew only one trade well; mine could do everything they could and more. He was special.

I could never hope to learn what he knew; there was too much.

I grew up wanting to be just like him; I wanted to be a master blacksmith and to work beside him as an equal. I always assumed it was a failure on my part, that I was just too stupid to learn. Though he told me otherwise and praised me often for the things I learned, I knew it was just a disappointed father trying to make his idiot son feel better.

Now a man called Wolf came to tell me that I could gain the knowledge Father had — that it was part of the magic he guarded so jealously. But Wolf was gone.

I blew out the flame in my lamp, sat on the edge of my bed, and stared out the window at the thin sliver of a moon that hung just above the trees. Normally I loved to watch the moon, but tonight it just reminded me of all the things beyond my grasp.

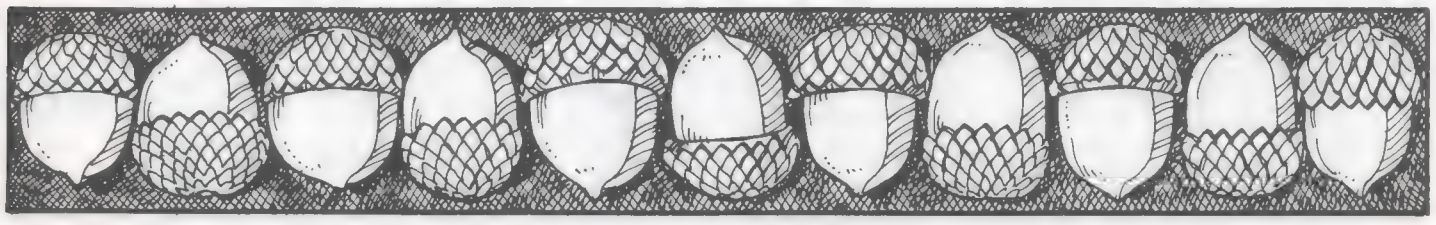
I heard the front door close and I went to the window. Father walked quickly down the road and into the night. He had his bag and flask; he planned on being gone for a while.

I grabbed a light coat and climbed through the window. There was no reason for him to be going out tonight. Unless ...

I ran as quickly as I could while still being quiet. By the time I got to the corner of the lane I could only just see Father disappearing into the distance off to my left. I followed as close as I dared until he suddenly turned off the road and into the woods that bordered it. I ran after him now, heedless of the noise I made. If I lost him in the trees I'd never find him.

When I reached the place where he had left the road, he was already gone. I stood for a moment, listening, hoping to at least find his direction. Then I noticed the light deep in the trees.

I walked toward it and soon recognized a bonfire set in the middle of a clearing. I stared — I knew these woods as well as anyone, and I knew there



was no clearing in them. At least not this close to the road. I looked back the way I had come and the view was different, unfamiliar. I ran back to the road and stared.

The road in front of our house is a long straight lane that extends like a line as far as the eye can see in either direction. To the west is Landers, the mining town that provides us with most of our smithing jobs. To the east is Harrison, the county seat. Between is nothing but flat open countryside dotted by the occasional home and stand of trees.

But the road I stood on now twisted among rolling hills. Lush growth covered the ground, and the wide dusty road had dwindled to a narrow path through the grass. A massive full moon hung in the cloudless evening sky and cast a brittle white light over the scene so that everything was illuminated as if by day, but with no warmth, no depth.

I had found the place of magic.

I turned back and picked my way through the trees toward the distant fire. I could see two men standing on either side of the fire talking. The flames leapt and danced, but there was something wrong about it. It took me a moment to realize what disturbed me: there was no sound. The lush countryside screamed of life, but there was no sound of it. No endless chittering of crickets or shrieks of night birds. No rush of rodents through the brush or clacking of locusts rising out of the grass. Even the smell of nature was gone — only the scent of my own sour sweat came to my nostrils. It was as if the whole scene was dead, illuminated by the sterile light of a cold moon, the form of nature but none of its substance. Only the gentle rush of a light breeze kept the scene from being an alien nightmare.

I crept close and saw Wolf and my father talking. Their voices carried clearly through the still night.

"... wish you had never learned it?" Wolf asked.

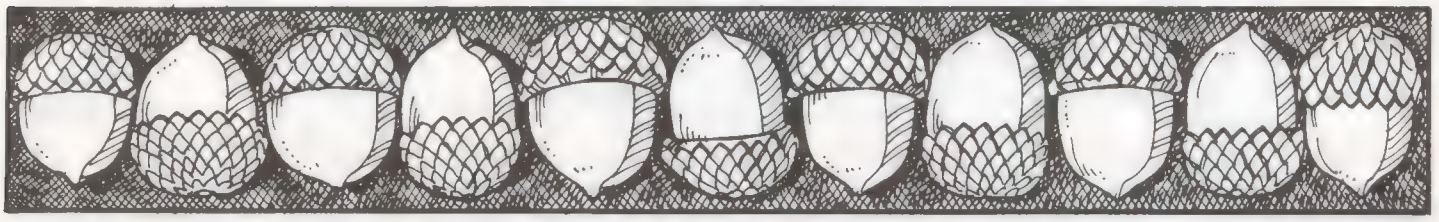
"What a question!" Father laughed. "Give up perfect knowledge? No. But I wish I had never lost it. There is nothing as empty as losing that knowledge."

Wolf raised an eyebrow. "If I thought I would never be able to escape the pain, it would be intolerable."

Father shook his head. "Nothing is worse than losing the knowledge, Wolfgang. I don't want Franz to suffer that."

"Then the magic will pass from the earth," Wolf said. "I am finished. You used the last of my reckoning today."

Father started to speak then stopped. His shoulders slumped and he let out a long sigh. "Let me talk to him first. I



Artwork by James Balkovek

Artwork by James Balkovek

can try to explain."

Wolf frowned. "You can't tell him anything meaningful."

Father laughed, a sad sound. "He thinks I'm ignoring him when the magic stops me." He turned away. "But I have to try again. Stay away until then."

Wolf nodded. "I will not approach him for three days."

Father hesitated only a moment. "Three days, then."

He turned and walked straight at me. I scrambled back and he passed within a few feet. But he did not see me and he did not stop. I watched him until he left the woods and started down the strange road .

I turned back toward the clearing and Wolf looked straight at me. "Come, Franz. There's no need to lurk in shadows."

Wolf smiled as I stepped into the clearing. "What can I do for you?" he asked.

I chewed on my lip. There were so many questions. "Who are you, and why did Father attack you?"

"I am Wolfgang Fuhrmann and I am the keeper of magic. Your father attacked me to keep me from teaching it to you."

"Why?"

"Only he can tell you that," Wolf said.

I shook my head. "He won't tell me anything."

"He can't tell you about the magic. That is one of the conditions of knowing it. Only I — or the one who fills my role — can teach you."

"You will teach me?" I asked, my voice low.

"Yes."

I hesitated. "You told Father you wouldn't talk to me for three days. You lied."

"I lied to no one," he said, a smile playing at the corners of his lips. "I said I would not approach you for three days, and I haven't. You came to me."

I shook my head. "That's a word game. You lied."

Wolf shrugged. "The world is controlled by words, Franz." He gazed at me, his pale blue eyes fading away in the dancing firelight so that empty white orbs stared at me in the flickering darkness. "But words are just a tool of thought. Where words fail, it is usually thought that is confused."

He looked down at his hands and rubbed his fingers as if they were covered in something he could rub off. He sighed and dropped them to his sides.

"What do you want from me, Franz? You have breached a great barrier to come to me here, and I can refuse you nothing while you are here. You decide where the limits are and what can or cannot be done."

I blinked. "It's up to me? You can break your promise to Father, then blame it on me?"

"Yes," he said, nodding once. "But I haven't done anything yet, Franz. And I won't unless you ask me to."

I looked away, suddenly confused. I stepped to the edge of the clearing, stood among the trees at the border of his circle. I touched a tall aspen and noticed that its trunk was perfectly smooth and unblemished. I touched another and another and found them all perfect, with no knots or scratches. Each blade of grass was perfectly straight, each tree a model of the ideal. In the center of the clearing stood Wolf, his face an empty mask, his eyes blank in the light of the moon. He watched me across the clearing, but made no effort to call me back.

I started into the woods. I had to talk to Father one more time, give him one more chance to teach me what he knew. I pushed through the brush and headed toward the thin winding trail of a road. With each step I remembered how much I wanted to know about the magic, how badly I had wished for someone — anyone — to tell me about it. With each step I felt the chance to learn slipping away from me, disappearing through the brush. It was right there in a clearing in the woods; everything I had wondered about, everything I had cried myself to sleep about on countless nights in my house that was better than everyone else's.

I stumbled through the trees and finally burst through the brush and out onto the road. I wanted to know so badly, and Father had refused — no, failed — to tell me so many times before.

But he promised Wolf that he would tell me if he could.

I turned up the wide straight road that led into the distance like a line, and walked slowly home.

I was throwing corn out for the chickens when Father came. It was still dark and the morning was chilly; I wore a light coat and a hat for my chores even though it was August. Though the day would find nearly intolerable heat, the dark of morning was as cool as a late November day.

"Franz," he said, his voice gruff.

I turned around. He stood there in his traveling clothes, canvas pants and a light cotton shirt covered by a wool coat he could take off later, worn leather shoes on his feet. "Franz, I have to deliver the plow to the Petersohn farm on the far side of Harrison." He looked down at his feet. "The plow must be used immediately; if night comes and it has not been used, the magic will fade and the enchantment will be useless."

I smiled. "I understand. Thank you."

He gripped me in a tight hug. "I wanted to protect you, but it came here anyway. I was afraid for you. I was afraid for me."

He stepped back and I saw that his eyes were wet. I opened my mouth, and he motioned for me to be quiet. "I don't have much time." He took a deep breath. "There is something we've named magic that calls upon the very powers of the foundations of the world. Only one person may know the fullest extent of that magic, and Wolf is —"

Father gasped and grabbed his stomach. "Wolf is the keeper — he knows all —" He fell to his knees as if struck from behind, and I moved forward. "... Cost of pain ..." Father hissed through clenched teeth. "The magic ... costs pain ... paid by one ... for all."

Father's eyes opened wide and his mouth stretched in a soundless scream as he fell forward into the dirt. I stood over him, powerless to help. While I wanted to tell him to stop, to let him keep the secret he had held for so long, I could not say it. Perhaps it was a failing of my own soul, but I had to know.

He scrabbled in the dirt and pushed himself to a sitting position. He reached into his coat and pulled out a sheaf of papers. He pushed them into my hands and whispered, "I knew I would ... be stopped." He smiled and pushed the wad of papers at me. "I wrote it down. Read it."

I straightened the crumpled pages and looked at them in the pale light of coming dawn. At first I thought it was the bad light, but as I stared at the words on the paper it became clear that there was nothing there.

I handed the pages back to him. "Scrawls and hen scratches. *Unsinn*."

He stared at me, then at the page. After a moment he released the papers and the gentle breeze scattered the pages across the yard. I watched them flutter away.

It wasn't fair! I had done everything; I had waited for him to tell me. I had done the right thing.

"I have to know," I said through clenched teeth.

He took a deep breath and let out a long sigh. He held his arm out to me and I stepped forward. He hugged me close, and I could feel his own frustration in the tightness of his muscles.

He nodded once, and pushed me away. "Go then."

I smiled and turned away, ran down the dusty path to the road. At the corner I turned back. "Thank you, Father," I called and ran up the road. I heard him say something, but couldn't make it out. I didn't stop to ask him to repeat it.

I stepped into the clearing, and Wolf sat where I had left him. He looked up at me. "You're back," he said.

I nodded. "How do I get it?"

"You ask."

I hesitated only a moment. "I want the magic. Give it to me."

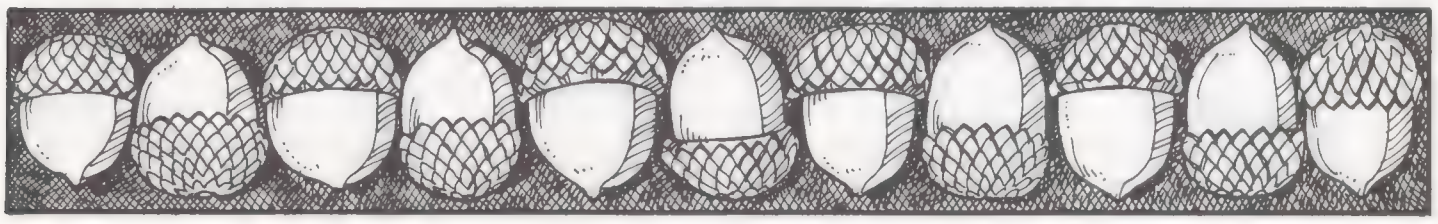
His gaze was intense, his blue-white eyes glowing in the dancing firelight. "Ask a question I can answer. Be specific."

"Teach me how to enchant a plow the same way Father did. Teach me how to put the magic into it."

"Is that all you want to know?" he asked.

I hesitated. I wanted to know everything, yet despite the disappointment of this morning I still wanted to learn as much as I could from Father. He couldn't tell me outright, but if I learned something of the magic, perhaps he could prod me to learn the rest on my own.

I nodded. "Teach me that. If it works I'll come back."



Artwork by James Balkovek

"There is more to magic than spells and power. All things are done at a cost."

"I want to know how to do the spell Father cast on the plow!" I shook my head. "You can't do it, can you?"

He sighed. "If that is all that you want to know, that is all I will teach you."

In the flickering light of the big fire Wolf taught me, and I greedily took in his words.

I stood at the forge and heated the plowshare until it glowed a dull orange. I marched in place, my feet working the pedals that pumped air into the forge. I pulled the plowshare out of the fire and studied it. It was ready.

I closed my eyes and concentrated on the plow. I envisioned the plow cutting into the earth, and I saw the dirt part and turn. I imagined the soil as a mixture of nutrients and made the picture in my mind match the one Wolf had showed me. I saw the soil become dark and rich everywhere the plow touched.

I felt the power gather in my arms and hands and I smiled. It was working. The air began to change and I smelled the same deep, earthy scent I had noticed the day before. The tingling in my hands increased.

I opened my eyes and looked down. My hands and wrists sparkled with the power. The tongs glowed a bright red, as though heated to near melting. I dropped the tongs in the fire, suddenly unsure. Wolf didn't say anything about the tongs burning red-hot, so I stepped back to gather my thoughts. Then the pain came.

It was as if my hands were on fire. I flung off the heavy gloves. My skin glowed red — not the pale color of a simple burn, but the deep radiance of heated metal. I rushed to the dousing bucket and thrust them in up to my elbows, but nothing happened.

I screamed and pulled my hands out of the water. The pain! I grabbed at the dirt to quench the fire but nothing would make it stop. Panic gripped my mind as I tried to figure out what to do; then I saw the tongs and reached for them with both hands.

The magic exploded out my hands and I was thrown back. Heat washed over me and I smelled the hair on my face as it curled and burned. Cacophonous noise assaulted my ears like the rushing of a great wind, then it was gone.

I stood up, and pain flared through my hands. I looked down and gasped. The skin had bubbled and blistered and open sores covered my skin. As I watched, the sores closed and the pain subsided. In a few moments they were healed, but mottled scars covered every surface.

I closed my hands and they were stiff, the skin pulled tight. I knew they were crippled.

I tilted my head back. "Why?" I screamed as the tears flowed down my cheeks. "I did everything! Why?" I stumbled down the path to the road, turned left and ran toward the wood. Toward Wolf.

I turned off the road and crashed through the brush. Branches ripped at my face and I had to duck to avoid them. I tripped over a branch and landed face down in the dirt. When I stood up the woods had changed. It was night and the big moon hung in the sky. I saw the fire ahead of me and moved toward it.

He was there, sitting on a log by the fire. He looked up and I saw he expected me.

I held up my hands. "You knew this was going to happen. Why didn't you tell me?"

He shook his head. "You didn't ask me the right question."

I rushed at him and pushed him down, shouted, "You're playing games with my life! What gives you the right?" I grabbed a burning branch out of the fire and glared down at him.

"You gave me the right," he whispered. I raised the burning stick and prepared to hit him, to scar him as he had scarred me. He just lay there. Then his words sunk in and I stepped back.

He slowly gathered himself and stood up. "I couldn't tell you what you didn't ask. We all work under certain limits."

I dropped the stick and held up my hands. "I was doing everything you told me. I felt the power; I smelled it. I opened my eyes and saw the power in my hands and I suddenly didn't know what to do."

He nodded. "The magic needed outlet; your hesitation broke the spell."

"Why do you always speak in riddles? At least Father kept his mouth shut."

He sighed. "What can I tell you that you would understand, Franz? There is so much. I can give you that knowledge, but you have to ask."

I laughed, an angry bark. "And what happens when I ask for that? Does my head explode? Do my eyes melt? Why do I want your knowledge?"

He shook his head and shivered despite his warm clothes and the fire. "In older days the cost of magic was borne by all, equally. But some used that power for evil purposes and all paid the price of their evil. People no longer tolerated the use of magic — good or evil — if they were forced to pay for that which they did not use themselves."

He smiled sadly. "They were correct, after a fashion — it was not fair for them to carry the burdens of others. But it was right." He sighed. "To keep magic alive, a few agreed to pay the cost, and those few were given knowledge so they could understand what they did."

I stared. "That's who you are?"

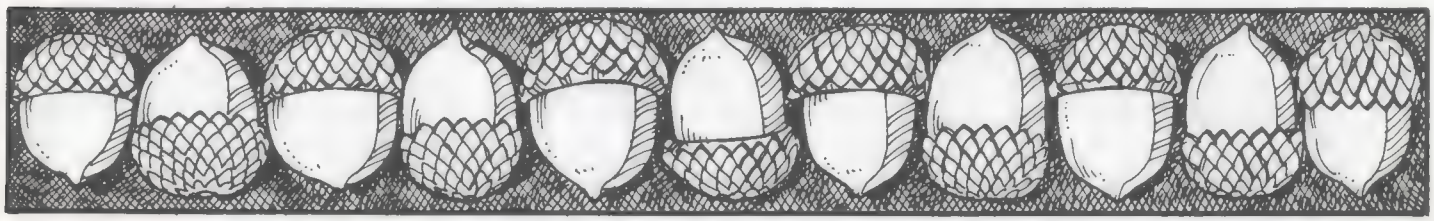
"And your father before me. But my time is done and I must pass it on."

"To me?"

"If you want," he whispered.

I looked down at my hands and remembered the pain I had felt. Anger rose again as I saw the scars, then it vanished. He had asked if I wanted to know anything else. He had tried to warn me after his own fashion.

I thought about Father and the many little enchantments I had seen him do; the plow that would help a family live and a community grow; the fittings for the town bridge that would never break. I could not let that die. I looked at my hands one more time, then dropped



them and turned around.

"Teach me what I need to know to use the magic," I whispered.

"Do you understand what that means? You will suffer the cost of its use."

"I will gain the knowledge my father has and I will finally understand," I said.

He nodded once and moved away from the fire, down a path that led through the trees, and I trailed along behind. He touched the trees as he went by and picked a pair of large ripe walnuts from one as we walked. I heard the gurgle of rushing water, and he turned off the trail and headed toward it. We emerged on the bank of a wide fast-running stream. He reached into the folds of his coat and pulled out two metal cups. He dipped the cups and handed one to me. The cup was icy cold.

He crushed the nuts in his hand and gave me a piece. We both ate silently. Then he raised his cup. "So it is done."

I sipped from the cup and my mind was opened.

It came over me like a wave, torrents of knowledge that flowed into my mind, illuminating my world, showing the connections among all things that should have been obvious to me but never had been until now. I understood the magic and how easy it was — and how sad it was that people had lost that simple gift.

I raised my hand and produced a floating ball of light, a simple trick. I watched the yellow ball hover in the air and noticed the scent of ozone. Then the agony came.

It was an exquisite pain that burned not only in every part of my body, but in every corner of my mind, of my soul. It shattered my senses and penetrated my being until I could think of nothing but the pain. Eventually it faded.

Wolf smiled. "I did the same thing. So did your father. It seems so natural, doesn't it?"

I looked up at him and saw not the mysterious stranger I had known only a few minutes before, but a tired man who had served his duty and earned his rest. "I understand now," I whispered.

He bowed and I saw strain come into his face. He staggered back a step and leaned against a tree. "Your father was right," he said, his voice rough. "The pain of losing the knowledge is greater than ever the pain of having it was."

He turned away and headed back up the path. As he walked he slowly pulled off the heavy clothing that covered him: the skins, the coats, and finally the boots. I saw that his left arm was withered, the flesh of his shoulder sunken. He looked back at me and pointed at his arm. "I learned the same way you did," he said. "It seems like the only way; we come to the point where nothing else is more important."

I nodded. "Nothing else is. The magic lives — for another generation, at least."

I heard the sounds of someone crashing through the brush and turned around to see my father stumble into the clearing. He looked at me, his gaze searching, and I saw his shoulders slump.

"Then you've done it," he said in a tired voice.

"It is what I had to do," I said.

He nodded. "I know, I just wish I could have been here." He hesitated a moment. "I love you, Franz. I only want the best for you. That's all I've ever wanted."

I hugged him. "I love you, too." And for perhaps the first time in my life I knew it was true.

Father nodded and turned away, and I watched him disappear into the clear night beneath a sterile moon. ❄

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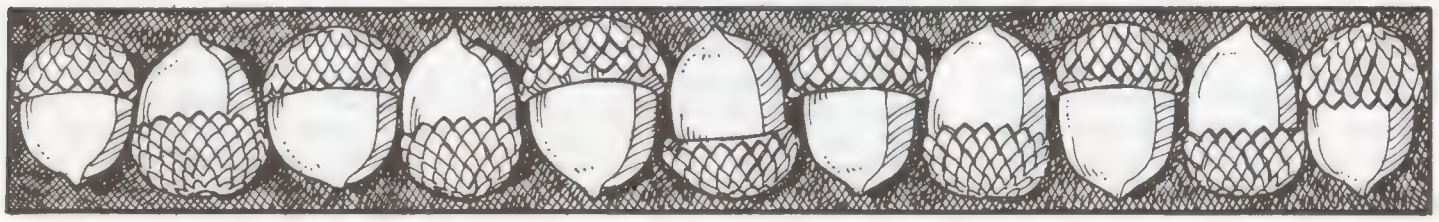
James Balkovek is a native Californian and a graduate of California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. An illustrator of numerous children's books, he has many years of illustration and design experience in commercial as well as editorial illustration. He runs BlackEagle productions, a graphic arts studio in central California with clients throughout the state.



Artwork by James Balkovek

A Scent of Magic

by John Buentello

"What do you mean, you're not a wizard?" Lord Bakor roared. "You were in the Wizard's Hall. I saw you wielding a magic staff, and conjuring a ball of fire even as I stole into the room. You must be a wizard!"

Tyrell shook her head. From where she sat tied to the Lord's rather ornate chair, she could see he was angry. He paced around in the large space of his royal chambers, kicking at velvet pillows and slapping his ringed hands against columns made of pure jade. When he turned to look at her again his dark eyes fixed her with an accusing stare.

"You're lying to me, aren't you? In the hopes I will free you long enough for you to use your powers to escape. That's it, isn't it?"

Tyrell wished it truly was. The ropes that held her hands and feet to the chair had been tied uncomfortably tight. She shook her head again, and this time the motion caused her long, straw-colored hair to fall over her face. She flipped her head back and tried to peer through the strands that were still hanging over her eyes. Her mother had warned her to keep the long mane she sported tied back when she was working. Now Tyrell wished she had listened.

"Concealing your gaze so you can bedevil me, is that it?" the Lord said. He laughed, the sound filling the chamber. It wasn't a bad laugh, as far as Lordly outbursts went. Tyrell found it didn't chill her as much as it was apparently supposed to. "You can't fool me that easily, witch. I'm wise to your tricks."

"A wizard is not the same thing as a witch," she replied, repeating the argument she had often heard bandied about in the Wizard's Hall. "A wizard utilizes the power of true magic. A witch is granted her power by demons."

"Ha!" Lord Bakor interrupted. He strode over to the chair and brushed Tyrell's bangs from over her eyes. "If you aren't a wizard, then how do you come by such arcane knowledge?"

"By keeping my ears open," Tyrell said. She saw his hand rise up above her and braced herself for the blow she thought to come. Instead, he reached over and tucked her dangling hair back over her ears. He backed away from her then and squatted, looking her up and down with an appraising eye. Tyrell noticed for the first time how young Lord Bakor really was. She'd heard tell that the old Lord's son had just been coming into his manhood when the Lord died some years back, leaving him all the province to care for.

"Are you sure you aren't a wizard?" he asked her again. Tyrell nodded. She was careful not to do so too strongly, lest her bangs get the better of her again. "I told you, I am a maid. I work in the Wizard's Hall. And that wasn't a magic staff you saw me wielding. it was a broom. I'm not a wizard."

"There's one sure way to find out," Lord Bakor said. "I could throw you in the moat. If you float, then that will prove you are a wizard."

"That's witches again, not wizards." Tyrell let out an exasperated sigh.

Lord Bakor shook his head in wonder. "How can a maid know all the things you seem to know about wizards?"

"Because wizards love to talk, and to argue, and to brag endlessly about themselves," Tyrell told him. She was beginning to get a pounding headache from the pain coursing up through her wrists and ankles. "Being a maid to wizards has given me the chance to find out all sorts of things about them."

"But what about the orb of fire I saw you conjuring?"

"I said I was a maid, not an imbecile," Tyrell replied. "Wizards love to show off, especially to pretty young maids. I've learned lots of tricks from them. Summoning up a lightball is a simple thing, really. Even a Lord could do it. I promise I'll show you how if you'll just let me go!"

Lord Bakor's face fell. He nodded silently and stepped forward to untie Tyrell. As he stepped back again with the cords of rope in his hands, he shook his head and sighed. "I was really hoping you were a wizard. I need a wizard's help."

"Kidnapping someone is a funny way of asking for help." Tyrell rubbed her wrists and ankles, feeling the blood begin to flow back into them. "You're lucky you didn't try kidnapping a real wizard. All the ones I know would have turned you into a toad."

Lord Bakor walked over to another chair sitting in a corner of the room and slumped into it. "I'm desperate. I already tried petitioning the Wizard's Hall for help. All they did was laugh and send me away."

Tyrell's face became puzzled. "Now that I don't understand. No wizard worth his power would turn down an emergency request from the Lord of the Province. What did you ask for? Help in winning a war?"

Bakor shook his head. His body seemed to slump even lower into the chair. "No, not exactly."

Tyrell sat back down in Lord Bakor's royal chair and drummed her fingers against one arm. "Did you ask for absolute power over your subjects? That's a pretty popular request these days."

Bakor shook hi.s head. "No, I really don't care what they do, as long as they

don't decide to storm the castle."

"Hmm." Tyrell bit at her lower lip. It was an affectation she often employed while thinking. "Did you ask to be made immortal?"

"No."

"To add to your sexual prowess with the maidens?"

Bakor blushed and shook his head. "Not that!"

"Then what?"

Lord Bakor rose from his chair and walked to the door of his chambers. He stopped and motioned with his hand for Tyrell to follow. He led her into the decorated hallway she had seen upon her unanticipated arrival and down toward the west wing of the castle. They passed several doors of diffrent sizes and shapes, finally stopping at a great oak door edged with silver hinges. A heavy iron padlock hung from the handle of the door. Taking a tiny key from a pocket in his vest, Bakor bent down and opened the lock. He cracked the door open just wide enough to peek inside. Then he turned and regarded Tyrell.

"What you are about to see you must never divulge to another living soul." His face grew hard and he said in a stern, commanding voice, "For if you do speak of it, then..." He paused for a moment, his face contorting as he searched for the proper words. Finally, he shrugged and said, "well, then everybody will know. So keep quiet about it."

Opening wide the chamber door, Bakor stepped back to allow Tyrell to enter. She stepped cautiously past him and into the room. The chamber was a delicately decorated bedroom, with white and yellow tapestries adorning the windows. Rich, golden carpet, made from the finest wools, covered the dark wood floor. A large bed stood in the center of the room. A canopy fashioned from silks of different colors hung from the posters, hiding the interior of the bed. From within the veil surrounding the bed, Tyrell could hear the sounds of very loud and very bothered snoring. She turned and gave Bakor a questioning look.

"My sister, the Lady Arded, lies within," he whispered. "She is, like you, a dabbler in magic. Or at least she was. She was invited to the Wizard's Hall along with a number of other ladies in waiting from around the province. While the wizards were giving a tour of the hall, she found a library and stole a book from it. When I found out about it I demanded she return it at once. She refused. She said it was a book of magic, and that she'd found a spell which would make her the wisest person in the world. She worked the spell." Bakor shook his head. "I don't think she was very successful."

Tyrell slowly stepped toward the bed. She reached out her right hand and drew the canopy aside. Peering down at the form slumbering loudly on the satin sheets, her breath caught in her throat and froze there. She stepped back quickly, trying to back out of the room, but by then it was too late. She could feel vibrations rising from the pit of her stomach. She almost made it to the door when she bent over double and laughed the loudest she had ever laughed in her life.

"Quiet!" Lord Bakor hissed. He grabbed hold of her and tried to drag her from the room. Tyrell was squirm-

Artwork by Lynne Fahnestalk

ing on the floor, lost in fits of uncontrollable laughter. Bakor tugged at her and glanced frantically back at the bed.

"Please! You'll wake her!"

"That's your sister?" Tyrell roared. She slapped at her thighs and began to choke on her own spit. "Look at her nose! Look at that great, big nose!"

She twisted and stared at the sleeping Lady Arded as Bakor struggled to get her out of the room. The woman who lay on the satin sheets was possibly the most beautiful woman Tyrell had ever seen. She had flowing black hair and skin the color of cream. Her lips formed a perfect bow of red on her face. She also sported a nose the length and width of a blue-ribbon melon. As the Lady Arded turned in her sleep, her huge nose kept her head from following after her body, twisting it into a strange shape. Tyrell felt her sides begin to stitch as new waves of laughter engulfed her. She laughed long and hard as Bakor bore her down the hallway, giggling and snorting as he dragged her back into his chambers and dropped her into a chair."

"You might have awakened her!" he snapped after he'd shut the door behind him. He stood with his hands at his sides and glared at Tyrell. "Do you know how hard it is to keep her quiet once she's awake? I can't even walk out to the stables without hearing her wheezing. She knows if there's anything out of the ordinary going on in the castle."

Tyrell nodded and wiped at her eyes. "She can probably smell trouble brewing." A fresh spasm of laughter gripped her. She put her hand to her mouth and looked at Bakor. The Lord was frowning at her, his eyes smoking with anger.

"Forgive me, Lord Bakor. It's not every day I see something like that, even at the Wizards Hall."

"That 'something' happens to be attached to my beloved sister."

"I'm sorry. I know how you must feel." She also knew why none of the wizards at the Hall had answered the summons for help. No wizard in his right mind would have risked his reputation. Who would want to be known as the mage who performed a 'nose job' on the Lord's sister? Especially if it made matters worse? "How did it happen?" Tyrell asked.

"I told you, she read this spell out of a wizard's book. I think she may have mixed up the words."

"Show me this book."

The book turned out to be a Mage Relic, one of the original works of magecraft written long ago by a master wizard. Tyrell had heard of such things from the wizards at the Hall. She could feel the aura of power seeping from it when she picked up the book. The pages were scribed in the old tongue, but Tyrell had leaned much of that arcane language from having to decipher messages left to her by one of the dozens of wizards who ordered her around all day long. It took a little while to translate, but she was able to read the passage Bakor claimed his sister had attempted to use. She read the passage once, then again, then nodded.

"I now see how the lady ended up in her present condition."

Lord Bakor peered over her shoulder and stared at the scratchings on the page. "What does it say? Is it really a spell for transforming innocents into probiscian monsters?"

Tyrell shook her head. "It's a spell for acquiring true knowledge. Your sister was right about that. You were right about something, too."

"What's that?"

Tyrell set the book down in her lap. "She got the words wrong. This is a spell for transforming a wizard into an all-knowing mage. Very powerful stuff."

Lord Bakor wrung his hands together. "I still don't understand. What did Arded do wrong?"

A thin smile appeared on Tyrell's lips. "Instead of becoming one who is practically all-knowing, Arded spoke the words to become one who is practically all nose."

Bakor looked down at the book, then shifted his gaze to Tyrell. "You're kidding."

"These old spells can be pretty literal in how they command magic. Your sister tapped into some very old powers here. She simply asked for the wrong thing."

Bakor kneeled beside Tyrell and took her hand in his. Tyrell was surprised by the gesture, and even more suprised to find she enjoyed the feeling of his hand against hers. "Tell me there is a way to reverse the spell," he pleaded.

"A wizard could do it," Tyrell replied. "But I doubt one would even try. You said yourself they refused your request for aid."

"Can you reverse it?" Lord Bakor placed his other hand on top of Tyrell's. "Will you try?"

Tyrell squeezed his hand and grinned. "Well, my job is to clean up after wizards and their magic." Her face grew suddenly serious. "You should know there will be risk. Things could turn out worse than they are now."

"Worse than Arded having to sport a giant nose?"

"Death is worse," Tyrell said softly.

Bakor released her hands and rose to stand. "My sister would want to take that risk. What do we do?"

Tyrell glanced over the spell again. "Were you ever blessed by the Sacred Church?"

Lord Bakor shook his head. "The Bishop and my family have never been on really good terms ever since that heretic incident some years back."

"Then it's up to me," Tyrell replied. "I will need something from you."

Bakor nodded. "Name it."

"I'll need a large barrel of pepper." She smiled and then looked down at the spell book and began to read.

Bakor brought a barrel of pepper up from the pantry as Tyrell completed the last of the prayers the book had instructed her to chant. A soft, golden glow surrounded her as she stepped into Arded's bedroom. She directed Bakor to pull the canopy away from his sister's bed. She pointed to the barrel of pepper in his hands and indicated his sister's cavernous, quivering nostrils. "When I tell you, pour the pepper into her nose."

Bakor looked down at the bed. "It will give her a sneezing fit."

Tyrell nodded. "While you're doing that, I'll release the magic and let it mix with the pepper. Since I've been blessed by the Sacred Church I should be able to exorcise the magic from her body and change her back."

Lord Bakor's eyes slitted suspiciously. "Now that sounds like witchcraft."

Tyrell shrugged. "Those old wizards mixed things up a lot in their day." She concentrated on the lines of prayer running through her head and stretched out her arms. "Do it."

Bakor opened the top of the barrel. He looked down at his sister, closed his eyes, and poured the pepper into her nostrils. The Lady took in a deep breath, snorted and began to shake on the satin sheets. Tyrell opened her hands wide and said the words to release the glowing magic. It flowed in a golden cloud

across the room and disappeared into Arded's nostrils. It remained there for a brief moment, then Arded's nose twitched and an ear-shattering sneeze filled the room.

Bakor was blown backwards by the blast, throwing the rest of the pepper onto the floor. A second sneeze blew him clear out of the room, slamming him into the hallway wall. Tyrell leaned into the sneezes, watching as Arded and her huge nose shook and convulsed on the bed. The next sneeze that followed blew out the cloud of magic, along with other matter she tried not to concentrate on. Tyrell said a second set of words, and the cloud began to grow larger. When it was a large mass of gold and green hovering above the bed, she stepped forward and placed her hand on the tip of Lady Arded's giant nose.

"Bless you, My Lady."

Lord Bakor managed to crawl back into the room in time to see Arded snuffle loudly. The massive nose began to shrink in on itself. The pale white flesh of Arded's face flowed like water under Tyrell's hand, slowly losing its nasal shape. As Tyrell stood and watched, Lady Arded's nose shrank from the size of a melon to the size of a gourd. From there it shrank to the size of a pear. From there it shrank to the size of a plum. A plum it stayed. A rather lumpy one, at that.

"I'm sorry, Lord Bakor," Tyrell whispered as he rushed past her to hold his bewildered sister. "Some of the spell seems to have lingered."

Bakor looked at his sister's face and smiled. "Oh, that. No, Arded has always been blessed with a rather prominent nasal quality."

The Lady Arded looked up and stared at Tyrell. "What happened?" she asked in a whistling tone. "Who are you?"

"Your spell has been reversed, My Lady," Tyrell said. "As for me..."

"As for her," Lord Bakor interrupted. He stared at Tyrell and smiled. There was gratitude in his eyes, gratitude and a spark of interest. "This is Tyrell, our new maid."

Tyrell looked around at the stained walls and broken curtains of Arded's room. "I don't know," she said. "The wizards never asked me to clean up a mess like this."

"Would it help," Bakor said as he helped his sister to her feet. "If the Lord of the castle volunteered to assist you?"

Tyrell grinned and began rolling up her sleeves. "Lord Bakor, you've got yourself a maid."

❄

Artwork by Lynne Fahnestalk

John Buentello is a writer who has published a number of works in the fantasy, horror, and children's literature field. Currently he's at work on at least a dozen different things, the most challenging by far a collaboration with his brother. He is so happily married that his friends and co-workers are insanely jealous of him.

Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk has been working as a professional artist for over fifteen years. She is a two-time recipient of the Canadian Aurora Award for Artistic Achievement. Her artwork has appeared in numerous publications and is now included on the CD-ROM "Atlantis to the Stars". Lynne lives near Vancouver, Canada, with the lovely and talented Steve Fahnestalk.

Don't forget to vote for your favorites - Cauldron ballot on p. 64

Lawrence Watt-Evans:

Grandeur and Scope and Sweeping Romance

by Darrell Schweitzer

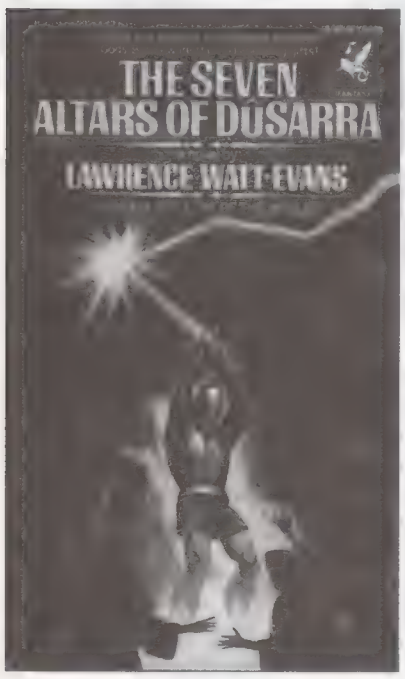
MZBFM: For the benefit of those few readers out there who have not read you, let's tell them where to start.

Watt-Evans: I don't know where the best place to start is necessarily. I am best known as a fantasy writer. I have done two series and a few singletons so far. The series were the **LORDS OF DUS** and the **ETHSHAR** series for Del Rey. Some of the **ETHSHAR** books are still in print and are worth reading, if I do say so myself. I am now writing for Tor. I've got a big fat fantasy called **TOUCHED BY THE GODS** which came out in November 1997.

It stands by itself. You don't need to read any sequels. I'm proud of this.

I've also written horror and science fiction. Most of the horror has been short stories because, lately anyway, they've been easier to sell. I did write one horror novel, **THE NIGHTMARE PEOPLE**, and I've written science fiction. **NIGHTSIDE CITY** is my personal favorite on that side. The one that sold the most is called **THE CYBORG AND THE SORCERERS**, which, despite having sorcerers in the title, is indeed science fiction.

I've written somewhere around thirty novels and a hundred short stories the last time I counted.



It seems you're slightly more of a generalist than many writers in the field. From the point of view of marketing, you work in three distinct categories. At least three.

At least three.

Do you get pressure from your publishers to become just one writer? Or even to write the same book over and over again?

Not to write the same book over and over again. I do get pressure to stick to one thing, which I am in fact now doing. I have decided pretty much to stick with fantasy because, basically, that's what pays the most. The science fiction that I did sold okay. It didn't do great. The horror novel flopped because it came out roughly when the horror boom was going bust in 1990. The fantasy on the other hand has done pretty well. So that is what I am writing nowadays.

It used to be a lot easier to be a generalist. Nowadays people really do expect you to stick to one thing, and if you write in more than one category you're expected to use more than one name. So I am seriously looking at possibly using other names in the future to write in other categories, and just keeping the Watt-Evans name for fantasy.

That'll look even stranger with you being the ex-president of Horror Writers of America.

I was elected on the basis of being a competent technocrat for reform rather than on the basis of being a brilliant horror writer. There are some people who have said good things about my horror writing, but I don't think anybody considers me a brilliant rising star by any means. I was more or less what HWA needed, which was somebody willing to do a whole lot of organizational work for a couple of years and get the organization back running again after it had gone into a bad slump.

*We now have the further irony that the organization is running but the horror field **isn't**.*

This is true. The horror field right now is not well. What horror is getting published these days is mostly getting published either as something else — either as mainstream or dark fantasy or something — or it's being published by sleazy publishers in grubby little mass-market paperbacks that most people never even see. Leisure Books comes to mind as an example of this. Leisure is capable of doing decent publishing. They've done some good work in the past, but most of their horror novels are pretty second-rate stuff, I'm afraid.

So this is not the time to expand your horror career.

No, it definitely isn't. When I started writing **THE NIGHTMARE PEOPLE** back in 1988, Tor had a horror line. That's gone. Zebra had a horror line. That's gone. NAL had a horror line called Onyx. That's gone. That's who actually published **THE NIGHTMARE PEOPLE**. Mine was the next-to-last horror novel that Onyx published. The horror field overexpanded in the '80s and went into a population crash and is still not recovered very much. So this is definitely not the time to be writing a horror novel.

How much does economics drive your selection of what you write?

I'm fortunate in that I always have more things that I want to write than I have time to write, and more than I could possibly sell. So, I don't come up with something because, Gee, I could make money doing this. But if I'm sitting there with a dozen different proposals that I am considering working on, I will try to pick the one that I think will make me the most money. Occasionally I have two or three projects to choose from. At least once it was literally a dozen, eleven of which ranged from totally unsalable to they'd probably do okay, but the twelfth one was pretty clearly going to make more money than any of the others, so that was the one I went with. I have had novels that I wanted to write that I have shelved indefinitely because there just wasn't any market for them, but as I say, I've always have something else to take its place, so it has never been any problem for me

You are indeed fortunate. I find that I have at best one novel at a time. Frequently not even that.

At one point in, I think, 1991, I was working on three novels simultaneously, and I had outlines for several more sitting in the background. So I've never had a problem with shortage of material.

How many of your thirty books are in print?

In print, at the moment, probably only about half a dozen. I haven't counted lately, but that would be a guess.

I guess that it is taken for granted by any writer with an ongoing career that most of your books are going to go out there, sell for a little while, and then die.

Yes. I've been lucky in that for the first sixteen years I was writing I was published by Del Rey, and for most of that time, not all of it, Del Rey had a policy of keeping books in print if they thought there was continued sales potential there. So most of those did stay in print. My first novel came out in 1980 and stayed in print until 1993, I think it was, which is pretty impressive these days. I've been published by other houses like Avon and NAL which did not have this policy, and those books came out and disappeared in fairly short order. At the moment I'm writing for Tor and they seem to be in-between. Some books stay in print and some don't. I'm hoping that mine will be among the ones that stay in print.

I think all of us have this sense from mass-market publishing that we are regarded as disposable and they could just as readily get something else.

This is unfortunately true. It's why you're seeing more books coming out as hardcovers, because people take that more seriously. In fact mass-market originals seem to be getting scarce. When I got started in the early '80s, there were very few hardcovers being published in science fiction. Almost everything was mass-market original. Now it's the other way around. Just about any novel that has any serious intent at all comes out in hardcover and is followed by mass-market. We're getting *Star Trek* hardcovers. Twenty years ago nobody would have thought of putting *Star Trek* in hardcover.

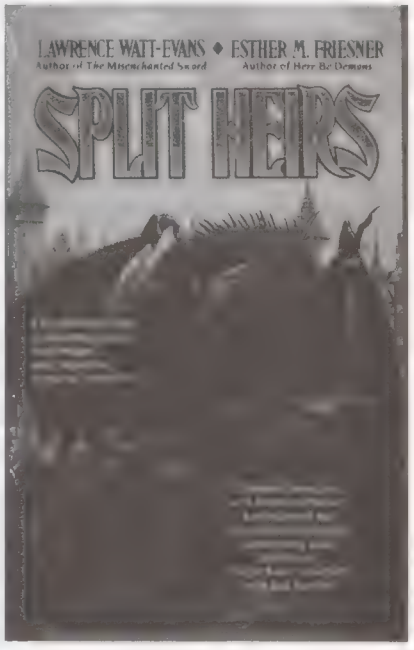
I suppose the conflict any writer must deal with is the conflict between special books and product.

Yes. I have occasionally had conflict with editors where they thought I was writing product and I thought I was writing a special book. That is in fact why I am no longer with Del Rey after those sixteen years, because I wrote what I had thought was going to be a breakout trilogy and they thought of it as just more product, apparently.

If you're interesting in just writing product, apparently you can do that and make a modest amount of money at it, but you're never going to be rich or famous doing it. If you want to do anything ambitious at all, you need to get out of that rut of just doing product and do something that will be recognized as a special effort, as something more than just one more in the stream. One reason I am at Tor now is that Tor seems to be especially good about treating a higher percentage of their books as books rather than book-like product.

I have to admit that if I were tempted to write a historical novel, I would be tempted to find a way to make it a fantasy novel instead. The research is a lot easier. But that's just sloppy.

I wonder if I am seeing the past through rosy glasses or something, but am I wrong that in the early Ballantine science fiction line, say, in its first five years, all of the books were so special that the two or three which are not classics stand out?



This is true, but that was a long time ago. There was an awful lot less science fiction being published then than nowadays. I have said in print and in the past (and really pissed off some of my compatriots in the field) that there are simply too many people writing science fiction nowadays, and too many of them are getting published. I know some people blame it on word-processors making it easier to crank out a novel, because there is less physical labor involved. I don't know if it's that or that successful movies have made science fiction more respectable, or what. But there are thousands of people writing science fiction, some of it pretty decent stuff without being stand-out brilliant. In the 1950s, if you wrote science fiction, you had to be devoted to the field. There wasn't much being done in it and there weren't many people who cared. By much I mean quantity, not that there wasn't brilliant work being done, because there was brilliant work being done. And nowadays it's become more of a mass culture and there's a whole lot more of it out there, and therefore the average has dropped. The average quality of both reader and writer, I think.

I suppose to deflate my own premise, I could point out that in the early Ballantines, circa 1953, within the space of a year, they'd publish Ward Moore's ***BRING THE JUBILEE****, Arthur Clarke's* ***CHILDHOOD'S END****, Bradbury's* ***FAHRENHEIT 451****, and Pohl and Kornbluth's* ***THE SPACE MERCHANTS****. But at the same time Fantastic Adventures and Imaginative Tales, two notably less-than-classic magazines, were being published. So the* ***product*** *in those days was still in the magazines, in the pulp tradition. Books were special. Nowadays, books are not special. There were few McBooks in 1953, only McMagazines.*

That's an excellent point. Back then the product was indeed in the pulps. Then the product moved into the paperbacks. Actually what worries me now is that in recent years mass-market paperbacks have been the product and the hardcovers were special the way the Ballantine paperbacks were in the '50s, but now there are more hardcovers being published. I am wondering if those are going to become just more product and the special events will have to find an-

other format. I don't know what it would be. This could be really tricky.

*Let's copy something from the mainstream. Have you noticed that seriously-intended literary novels have a **smaller trim size** than bestsellers? They do. They're several inches shorter. So what you do is put the serious science fiction novels in a literary-novel trim size so that they will stand out from the mass of product?*

This is an interesting idea. It may work. What especially interests me is that just recently, Tor Books, due to somebody in the budget department, has been making a concerted effort to produce smaller books, so they can fit more in a case and ship more in a truckload, to cut down on the production and shipping expenses. I also wonder if they may be thinking that if we make them smaller, they'll look more literary.

It's traditional that people think of the big, fat fantasy novels as being junky, because most of them are, and I wonder if there may be an association of smaller-is-better here.

Non-trilogy is better.

Well...generally, yes. There are some exceptions. I don't have anything against trilogies that I don't think endless series are even worse at, speaking as the author of both a trilogy and as the endless series.

I should think that a major problem facing any fantasy novelist of any artistic ambition is the uphill fight against the perception that fantasy is all Terry Brooks and Dennis McKiernan and R.A. Salavatore. It's rather like the uphill fight you'd have writing sword and sorcery in the late '60s. It was seen as all guys in fur jockstraps. So you encounter this immediate perception that there can't be literarily ambitious fantasy.

Fortunately you have a long tradition you can point back to, of William Morris and all that, of literarily ambitious fantasy. Your mention of sword & sorcery reminds me of something, though. When I sold my first novel to Lester del Rey in 1979, I thought it was a sword-and-sorcery novel. I made the mistake of saying so in Lester's hearing, and he was furious. He said, "**Del Rey Books** does not publish sword & sorcery." That bad reputation from the '60s was definitely still around, in his mind anyway. So what he published was heroic fantasy. I find myself reminded, thinking about it, of the distinction between horror, which is no longer quite the done thing, and "dark fantasy", which is. So I find myself wondering if we may have to invent some new name for fantasy to distinguish the more ambitious stuff from the shelf-filling trilogies by Brooks and so on. We haven't gotten to that point yet, but it's a possibility.

*For some of the really non-traditional stuff you can go for "American Magic Realism", which is Magic Realism by anybody who doesn't have a Spanish name. Of course Magic Realism is critically-respected fantasy by anybody who **does**.*

Exactly. Magic Realism is a way of saying "Well, it's fantasy but we don't want to call it that." North American Magic Realism may indeed be the next acceptable niche. It's not what I'm writing at this point. I'm writing pretty straightforward fantasy in **TOUCHED BY THE GODS** and the one I am working on, **DRAGON WEATHER**. They're very much in the traditional fantasy mainstream. I like to think they're a few steps above **THE SWORD OF SHANARRA**. But at this point I am interested in making money as well as in writing good fiction. Brooks and company make very good money. I'd like a piece of it. So following in their tradition does not disturb me, even if my books get looked at as product, as schlock rather than serious literature. At this point I would rather write profitable schlock than admired, but unprofitable literature.

Maybe the best you can hope for is to write something which is perceived as profitable schlock and sells like profitable schlock, but is recognized in retrospect as admired literature.

Exactly. I am going to write the same thing, pretty much. The question is how it will be seen. I don't know that I could write utter schlock if I tried. In fact once or twice I have tried and it didn't work. But very much it's a matter of perception, and I don't mind being perceived as writing schlock as long as it's profitable. If I am going to do that, I am going to write as best I can. If I write fantasy it has to have a background that I find coherent and reasonable, which a lot of fantasy doesn't. One reason I don't read more of what I guess you could call my competition is that I get so annoyed when I'm going along in a fantasy and I run into an invented world with a totally impossible economy, things like a subsistence agriculture that somehow manages to support a city with a population of a million. Things like that drive me up the wall.

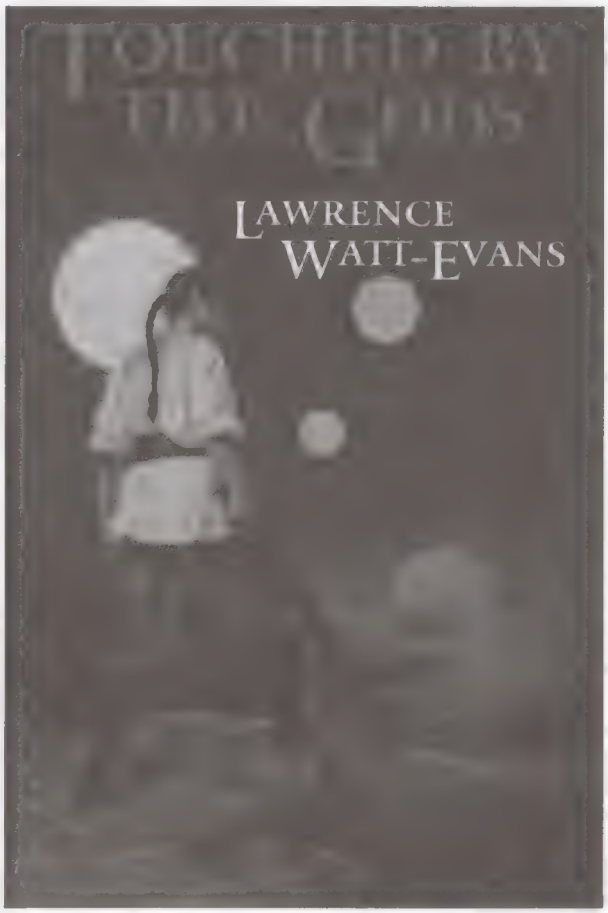
My favorite is the society that seems to consist entirely of swordsmen, sorcerers, and tavern wenches.

The swordsmen all come from the tavern wenches, but where do the next generation of sorcerers come from? Yes, that's a classic. I also get irked by people who can't be bothered to invent their own names, so they just steal names from all over without worrying about whether they go together. David Gemmell who writes a pretty decent piece of prose in most regards, is one of the particularly annoying examples of this. In **LEGEND**, the novel that pretty much made his name in Britain and never took off in the U.S., he has various ethnic groups interacting. The economy makes no sense in that story. The invading horde is millions of people who apparently have no supply lines whatsoever. They also have Turkic names. The invading horde appears to be

Mongolian in nature. But there's no reason for the names to be Mongolian. It's an invented world. It's not our world. Why would they have Mongolian names? He has all these little ethnic groups which are very obviously based on real ethnic groups, but he's got them in places where those ethnic groups wouldn't make any sense historically. That annoyed me. It would have been so easy to fix by inventing names, rather than just using ones that he took out of a historical text.

I think the model for this is Robert E. Howard, who was pretending, at least on alternate Tuesdays, that what he was writing was the early version of what later became our myths. Therefore he could re-use any name he wanted, because you were merely familiar with the later, possibly distorted version.

But he worked out how everything connected. He traced back ethnic groups to where he wanted them in his Hyborian world. It was consistent. It didn't necessarily make any sense in real historical terms, but it was all self-consistent. One of the things that really ticked me off in the follow-up Conan stories by others was that somebody who should have known better — I think it was L. Sprague de Camp — took the mythology that Howard had given his Norsemen, the Aesir and Vanir. He had one character swearing by gods that wouldn't have existed yet in Howard's universe. They came along later. De Camp had them as actual gods, whereas it was clearly implied in Howard's stories the myths of Thor and Odin were the mythologization of what happened to the Aesir after the collapse of the Hyborian Age. Therefore you couldn't have people swear by Odin and Thor before the Hyborian civilization collapsed. But de Camp did, which really pissed me off.



We can't really cite Howard as an exemplar of internal consistency, because the Hyborian Age has cultures existing side-by-side which range in technological level from ancient Greece to 14th Century France. Of course what would really happen would be that the guys in the full plate armor with heavy cavalry would sweep all before them.

There's some truth to that. He did tend to mix and match, although I've seen other people who did a lot worse. At least he could keep it fairly consistent within one particular cultural group. And of course the Hyborians, the ones with the 14th Century plate, did sweep all before them most of the time, except when they ran up against the Picts. Anyway, Howard's world was weirdly pieced-together, but it worked for me, whereas a lot of invented fantasy worlds look like they were just thrown together at random. There's not even an attempt at order.

I think you've gotten to something important here, which is that Howard got the mythic resonances right. It seems to me that a fantasy is more about myth than it is about the economics of an imaginary kingdom. I agree that you should indeed know how economics of barbarian hordes work, and how one rides a horse, and how a castle works, and so on. But if that's all the book is about, you ought to write a historical novel. The resonance of the supposed source of the Norse myths, not the economics, is what makes the Hyborian Age interesting.

Howard did get that right. Admittedly that is what you're trying for in fantasy. If you're just writing about ordinary lives of ordinary people that just happen to exist in a world other than ours, that's pretty boring and why bother, as you said. Howard got it right. De Camp, in his own fantasy, sometimes got it right and sometimes played with the idea. He would play off myth against reality, which I always found very enjoyable, and which was one of the things I was inspired by in writing the **ETHSHAR** series, which was de Camp's work. But, yes, mythic resonance is what fantasy is all about, because otherwise why would you want to read about all these impossible, silly things happening to non-existent people unless it did resonate with something in the back of your head? Howard was good at that. Tolkien was superb at that. He spent pretty much his entire life, it seems, working on mythic resonances. Some fantasy writers nowadays can do that, and others can't. Roger Zelazny was good at that, usually. It didn't even matter if he was writing fantasy or science fiction. He was good at picking things that either were archetypes or became archetypes.

It seems to me that what makes a fantasy work is more the Shadow in ***A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA*** *than the politics of an imaginary kingdom. What happens in LeGuin's book couldn't happen without the fantasy world. But I've seen a lot of fantasy novels that are really just sloppy historicals.*

I have to admit that if I were tempted to write a historical novel, I would be tempted to find a way to make it a fantasy novel instead. The research is a lot easier. But I agree that is just sloppy and I should resist the temptation. In fact, way back when, in which I set forth Watt-Evans's laws of fantasy, which was incredibly pompous and arrogant of me, but I did it anyway, I had six laws, one of which was that if a story can be told without a fantasy element, then tell it without the fantasy element and don't pretend it's fantasy. I still believe that. I try to follow it.

A story should have mythic resonance, but I don't know if that really means it needs to be a large-scale thing, with gods and high-level philosophical concerns. Mythic resonance can also mean making something apply to everyone regardless of culture.

One example of somebody doing it on a small scale is Fritz

Leiber. Any given Gray Mouser short story.

Exactly. Mouser is not a demi-god or anything, but he is very much an archetypal character, the clever little thief. He's a fairy-tale figure in some ways. That's why he works. It's also why I always found him much more interesting than Fafhrd. Fafhrd is sort of your generic barbarian, and I've read an awful lot of generic barbarians. Fafhrd is a *little* more than that, but he doesn't have the Mouser's charm because he doesn't have the same resonance for me.

I should think that the purpose of writing a historical novel is to have something to say about history. Thus, when Gore Vidal wrote ***JULIAN****, he found history which fit his theme. The book was about very specific things, about a turning point in the history of the real world. If somebody had said, "Well, Mr. Vidal, I think you should turn that into a fantasy so it will sell more," I am sure he would have had a few choice words to say in reply.*

I would think so, yes. In fantasy you are trying to be *less* specific. You are trying to find universal truths, which is hackneyed, but true. Fiction is supposed to be about the human condition.

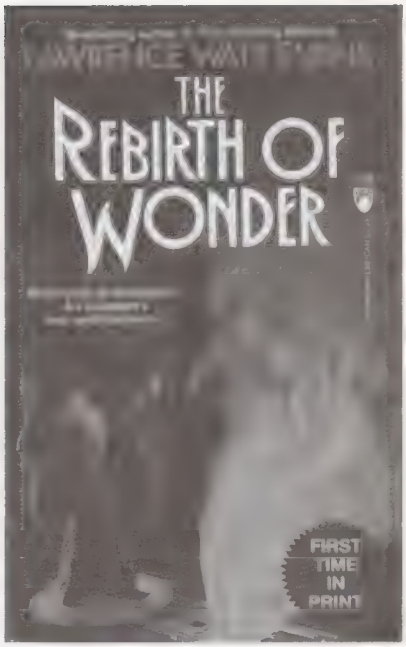
Well, fantasy is supposed to be about the condition of the human mind, the human emotions, the non-physical and not necessarily rational parts of being human. It's about things that are apart from our everyday lives, but which still concern us.

This is the secret of its appeal, but what is the special appeal of imaginary-world fantasy, as opposed to, say, Thorne Smith?

I think it gives your imagination more play, if you aren't tied to the real world at all. It also makes the suspension of disbelief easier. If you've got somebody who walks through the wrong doorway in a department store in New York and finds himself in a stranger and happier dimension, as happens in **RAIN IN THE DOORWAY**, you're starting off where the reader feels that they know this person, they know this city, and if there are these impossible things happening, they'll say, "That's impossible." If you set it instead in a completely new and unfamiliar place, they don't know what's possible and impossible. They have the pleasure of exploration and learning and being told, "this is how it works here." It lets the writer set the stage a lot more freely, rather than being forced to work with sets already standing, as it were.

You have two possible approaches. In one, you tell the story from the point of view of a native, and there's no connection to our world at all. In the other, you do as in ***THE INCOMPLETE ENCHANTER****, in which somebody from our world is transported into the other, and much of the tension of the book is the conflict between expectation and what the hero actually finds.*

Yes. I think that the person from our world thrown into an alternate world works a lot better if you're going for humor or a lighter tone, because you've got a situation where there are incongruities.



Things don't match up. That's a good basis for humor. If you're going for grandeur and scope and sweeping romance and all that, I think it's probably easier to do it with all native inhabitants. But it will work either way with either method. Stephen Donaldson took an Earthman and threw him into the Land for **CHRONICLES OF THOMAS COVENANT**. Barbara Hambly's **DARWATH** series has people from California in this particularly realm. Those aren't light fantasies. They're sweeping epics and all that. So, yes, you can do it either way. I think that there's a little problem in that if you use the characters from our world in an invented world, you really have to keep them as the viewpoint characters, pretty much, at least for a long time that you've shown them enough of the world and established the other characters. They maybe you can move on to someone else. That limits what you can do, because there is so much they don't know about the world. Given the specific story you are telling, one method might work better, or not at all, depending.

I think that the real pleasure of the native point of view is the alien mindset. Probably the writer who does this best is Gene Wolfe, who has never quite done an imaginary world — but ***THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN*** *is set a million years in the future and certainly feels like a fantasy. He captures the native mindset better than anyone. Also in his books about ancient Greece. These are certainly textbook examples of how to do it. He's very careful about imagery and language. I remember the famous blunder in* ***THE LORD OF THE RINGS****, at the beginning, in the party scene, in which Tolkien compares the noise the fireworks make to a steam engine. There are no steam engines in Middle Earth, so this is a blatant author-viewpoint intrusion and it breaks the spell of the story.*

That's true. I remember back when I was doing some critiquing for some workshop and somebody sent me a story he was working on in which a knight goes into a dragon's cave, and the cave has stuff strewn all over it, and the comparison the knight thinks of is "It looks like a rummage sale." Somehow I never thought of knights going to rummage sales.

This is the sort of thing that can knock you right out of the story if it is especially bad or especially common. Yes, it's something you have to watch out for. But if you're doing the Earthpeople-transported-to-another-world method, you can actually have fun with this because they'll make associations that the natives never would. But, as I say, I think that's one of the reasons that works better for light fantasy and humor.

Yes, if you want to have characters with a different mindset, you

use natives of the world who have grown up there.

Or you get unintentional humor. In the book ***GHASTLY BEYOND BELIEF*** *they quote something from one of the Terry Brooks novels, about an Elf-king in an all-weather poncho.*

...[Pregnant pause]...An **all-weather poncho?** Okay.

It remains my favorite. "The Eye of Argon" can't top it.

Of course people come to expect a sort of generic medieval setting and you can sometimes throw them off by having your setting deliberately *not* medieval. One of the things I like about the **LIAVEK** books is that they're about an 18th century technology, and in the series the locals have built a railroad. They've invented the steam engine and there are stories set around the building of the railroad. I thought that was a very clever thing to do.

It didn't catch on, but there's also the example of Fletcher Pratt's ***THE BLUE STAR****, which is set in an alternate version of the world of Maria Theresa.*

There are always non-medieval possibilities. With the **ETHSHAR** series, people tell me that it's medieval fantasy. That annoys me, because it isn't. The culture of the series is based on the later Roman Empire in the West. Nobody ever seems to notice this. They call it medieval. But there are no castles. There are cities with populations in the hundreds of thousands. This is *not* medieval.

I note that the niche that this kind of fantasy has taken over in publishing is the niche occupied by romantic historical novels in the '50s, Thomas Costain and all that crowd. The escapist bestsellers of the '50s were historicals. So in our more despairing moments we might suggest that the reason many people are reading fantasy now is that they no longer know any history, or care to.

You beat me to it. I think that's almost certainly it. Americans nowadays — I'm not sure why — don't seem to care about history and don't want to learn it. Partly this is because it's been taught so badly in American schools for so long. But, yes, I think that a lot of readers can no longer tell the difference between fantasy and history, so they would rather read fantasy, because that's got magic.

Some of the so-called historical novels do too.

This is probably true. I have to admit I haven't come across that particular perversion.

It's particularly prevalent in the women's romantic historical novels.

Yes. Historical romance novels are sometimes now what's called Paranormals, and they do indeed include magic, with real, genuine witches and so on. I have not read any of those. I have heard about them.

You and I should be uplifting about this. We should suggest that there's something positive that the fantasy can bring to literature which the historical can't. We've touched on much of this, but let's sum it up. If you had a choice of writing either, why would you choose to write a fantasy novel?

Strictly from my own point of view, I would say it's because you have a freer rein. You aren't confined by history. This is something that Judith Tarr and I have argued about at some length, because she considers pure fantasy to be inferior to historical fantasy, and she's a devoted writer of historical fantasy. I would much rather not be tied down to history when writing fantasy. I greatly prefer the idea that you don't know how it comes out, because if it's historical, you do know how it comes out, because here we are. This is where history went. In fantasy you don't know how it's going to come out. This provides greater freedom for the writer and more surprises for the reader, which are good things as far as entertainment value goes. As far as uplifting literary value, I'm really not sure that fantasy has any advantage over history. They both have pluses and minuses. History is more educational. But it's more limited, I think.

I think the specialized use of history — and this is probably what Judith would say — is that it's particularly good for epic tragedies, precisely because you know how it's going to turn out. We know what happened to Cleopatra or how the Fourth Crusade ended. What the reader doesn't know is how you got there.

This is true, but it's a trick mystery writers have used for years, where you give away the ending on the first page. You can do that in fantasy just as well.

I guess you're going to be in the fantasy field for a while. Are you going to be writing anything else? Any science fiction?

In short stories I am still writing science fiction. I have just recently written a time-travel story that's currently making the rounds. We'll see if it sells. In novels, I would like to get back to science fiction. For a while I was alternating. I would write a science fiction novel, then a fantasy novel, then a science fiction novel, then a fantasy novel. I would like to get back to that. But the economics don't encourage it right now. The part of my brain that writes science fiction rather than fantasy is starting to clamor to be heard. So I don't know what's going to happen with that. As I said, I am halfway through yet another fantasy novel, called **DRAGON WEATHER**, and I really don't know what I am going to be doing after that. I would like to think that maybe the market will shift and I will be able to write a big science fiction novel after that. I really don't know.

You mean there is no market for a big science fiction novel, or you get paid more for a big fantasy?

There is no market for a big science-fiction novel **by me**. There is a market for a big science-fiction novel by a newcomer, or by Greg Benford, or David Brin, because they are not identified as fantasy writers. If I write a novel under the Watt-Evans name, people are going to either pass it up because they don't read fantasy, or they're going to say, "Oh, it's science fiction. I don't read science fiction." And they will pass **that** up. There is so much out there that people can afford to be extremely picky, and they want to have genre and author match up. If I write a science fiction novel, that's not going to happen. So if I do write a big science fiction novel, it's entirely possible it'll be under a different name. It may happen. I don't know.

Thank you, Lawrence.

❄

Watt-Evans' Web page is at http://www.sff.net/people/LWE/.

Familiar with Magic

by Beth Kitchens

Khadra paused before the thick bog-oak door and batted away thorny strands of dripping traveler's bane hanging from the lintel. In the downpour, the house's stone façade looked unwelcoming, and she debated whether to leave.

"Come on," she muttered. "Where else have you to go?"

Khadra forced her hand around the iron ring hanging below a convex glass embedded in the door. She knocked once.

A magnified blue eye appeared in the glass and Khadra jumped back.

She turned to flee when a young girl's voice sounded behind the wood. "Wait there. She will see you."

The door groaned open and a blonde-haired girl stepped forward, straightening the spotted apron draped around her slight form. "She'll be angry for waiting. Come along."

"What?" No one in the house knew of Khadra's existence. Who was waiting?

Stepping into the musty entryway, Khadra noticed a mound of black fur lying to one side. She couldn't identify the type of animal, but it was obviously dead.

The girl grabbed her hand and pulled her down a flagstone hall. "Mistress Sliobine is in a state."

Hearing the name, Khadra allowed herself to be led into a high-ceilinged chamber. Tapestries and dark woven carpets protected the stone walls and floors from the chill.

Near a table laden with breakfast crockery stood a tall woman dressed in a green gown, a long fur vest, and a silk scarf worn over partially hidden, faded auburn hair. She toyed with a silver bracelet in the shape of two hands holding a clear stone orb. Behind her a doorway opened to a darkened room.

The woman turned her angular face toward the two. "Dorice, clear up here." She regarded Khadra with short-lashed hazel eyes. "You have come in a wagon?"

Khadra fought back her confusion. "No, I have walked —"

"Well, where is it? You cannot conceal a familiar in your cloak."

Khadra now realized what the dead beast once had been. "No, I'm Khadra from Gejhenna. I'm searching for a mage to study under as an apprentice."

Sliobine made an impatient gesture. "I expected they wouldn't send one today. Why don't you attend the Academy as other apprentices do? You tell them to send me a familiar immediately."

"I have no money for any school. I need to learn under a mage for food and lodging."

Sliobine smiled with no amusement in her eyes. "Do you know any of the arcane languages? Do you possess any magic?"

Khadra shook her head. "I can speak with creatures —"

Sliobine waved her comment away, although Khadra regarded her talent remarkable for a blacksmith's daughter.

"I don't have time for raw apprentices. Always in the way, and make a mess of things."

"But I've already spoken to every mage in the county."

"Well, you should try that adept in the next glen. Really a jumped-up journeywoman with a band of Academy rejects." She snorted. "Calls the place an 'atelier.'"

"I need to study under a proper mage." Khadra noticed the look of disdain on Sliobine's face. "What if I agree to be your familiar?"

The mage laughed, showing bright, equine teeth. "I've heard nothing so ridiculous."

"I read that a familiar is 'a being to attend and serve a sorceress, usually in animal form.' Why not a non-animal?"

"A definition from a human lexicon? What use is that?"

A thud sounded behind the wall. Khadra yelped and stared at the open doorway. "What was that?"

The mage frowned. "I need my problem solved today. Some important vials are in the stillroom, but none are broken as yet."

"What is in there?"

"How should I know?" Sliobine spread her hands. "Some spirit or other's been unleashed. Probably an-

other mage's curse."

And that's what killed the familiar, Khadra thought. She drew a breath. "I could speak with it."

Sliobine sighed. "If you rid me of the troublemaker, I shall consider you for an apprentice."

She ushered Khadra toward the inner room. "Rid me of it this afternoon."

Another crash sounded as if a shelf of books had collapsed.

Dorice dropped the tray she was holding. "Oh, Mistress! Why don't you magic the spirit? My nerves are frayed."

"My magic has no effect on a curse directed at me, addlebrain," Sliobine said. "If the child thinks she can talk to the creature, let her."

Khadra took another long breath and stepped into the stillroom. The space was a maze of shelves filled with jars, bottles, boxes, and dusty tomes of spell lore. A green glass window filtered in a tinted light, casting an emerald reflection as if the room was underwater.

The towering cases made the room even smaller, causing Khadra's heart to flutter with anxiety.

"Calm down," she muttered. She disliked small spaces, but this was no time for panic.

In front of the first row of shelves, pieces of a blue-stone jar lay mixed with blood and knots of sweet root.

Khadra grimaced, but noticed dried bloody pawprints leading away from the mess. Obviously the familiar had been eating the root from the lower shelf when the heavy jar dislodged and crashed on its head. Khadra marveled that the animal could stagger away before it died.

Khadra felt cold. What had the familiar released from the jar? Well, she needed to find out or she would never become a mage.

Khadra cleared her throat and began speaking in a rough, goblin language.

A weight struck between her shoulder blades and she was thrown forward.

"Ow!" A heavy tome of spells crashed to the floor.

She realized that, supernatural or not, the creature was solid and not some magical spirit.

Khadra backed out the door and found Sliobine cutting herbs at a window. "Have you performed your task?"

"No, I was almost brained by a book. There's a broken jar —"

"That clumsy Dorice! I told her to be careful while dusting."

"Your familiar knocked over the jar and released something."

"There are dozens of bottled imps, perfectly harmless." She plucked a leaf from a basil plant. "Perhaps you would rebottle it for me?"

"It attacked me! I can't go back without a protection spell."

Sliobine sighed. "Very well, but it's a waste of energy. Give me your hand." She spoke a few moments over Khadra's palm.

"I don't feel different."

"You should know a protection spell is totally invisible." Sliobine smiled. "I forgot. You're not from the Academy."

Cheeks burning, Khadra stepped into the stillroom. She began speaking normally since imps understood all languages. "I mean you no harm, but please show yourself. Sliobine needs to speak with you."

A creak sounded as if someone had been leaning against a bookcase.

"And I with her." A female voice echoed in the space between two shelves.

A red-haired girl emerged, with pallid skin and gleaming hazel eyes.

Khadra gasped, recognizing the face. It was as if twenty years had melted and left a young, smiling Sliobine.

"Are you her daughter?"

"Sliobine's? No, I'm her sister, Marea. We were twins; I suppose we still are." She frowned. "Who are you? With your

Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

muttering and barking, I thought she had sent in a monster to kill me."

"I'm being tested to become an apprentice, but that's not important." Khadra motioned toward the mess on the floor. "You were imprisoned in the jar?"

Marea nodded. "Years ago, Sliobine and I were chosen for magic by a great mage. We were to share our sorcery, but I suppose Sliobine wanted all of the power. She took our talisman and hid me away forever."

Khadra shuddered, imagining existing in a tiny space for eons. Suddenly she needed to leave this house and the mage. "We could break the window and escape."

"No, I must confront Sliobine. I need my magic."

"But she plans to imprison you again."

Marea shook her head. "I have dreamed for years with no hope of awakening. I awoke today and the reason was not to run away."

"Wait —"

But Marea pushed past Khadra and strode into the mage's sanctuary. Khadra hurried behind her.

Sliobine heard the footsteps and whirled around, dropping a glass beaker full of cut rosemary. For a moment, Khadra saw a flash of fear or embarrassment cross her face. Then Sliobine drew herself up, a bit taller than the twin of her younger self.

"You? If you've come to provoke me, I warn you I lost my conscience long ago."

"You bestowed that on me along with your uncertainties, before stealing my magic." Marea's hand gripped the end of her woven girdle. "But I've as much determination as you and I demand my powers."

"You can demand nothing of me." Sliobine smiled. "A mage without her powers is nothing."

She turned to Khadra. "Bring me the pieces of jar."

Marea touched Khadra's arm. "No mage can use magic in her own stillroom. She needs to restore the jar before holding me prisoner again."

The mage glared. "You wish to become my apprentice? Bring me the pieces."

Khadra stared at the wild hatred in her eyes. "You're lying. You'd rather kill me than share your knowledge."

"Very well. I shall immobilize you both until I can repair the jar."

"You may have my power, but you were never immortal!" Marea snatched a glass shard from the floor.

She lunged as Sliobine extended her arm, mouthing a spell.

"Wait!" Khadra pushed Marea out of the way. A cold white ray of energy burst toward Khadra's face.

Before she could flinch, Khadra felt a jolt crash directly in front of her. The power knocked her off her feet as the light reversed.

It sped away, exploding on top of Sliobine. The mage shot backward, slamming against the wall. A stray beam streaked into the stillroom.

Khadra and Marea held their ears as glass and wood crashed, echoing in the stone chamber.

Dorice galloped into the room as the last tinkling sounded. "I've never heard

such a noise! I thought the world was ending."

Marea helped Khadra stagger to her feet. "Are you all right?"

"I told her to wait." Khadra shook a cramp out of her calf. "I remembered the protection spell, but my thoughts didn't form."

They walked toward Sliobine's body lying against the wall. Her neck was at an odd angle and her eyes reflected pewter from the stones.

"Can you regain your power now?"

Marea stooped over Sliobine and lay her fingers on her sister's face. She quickly withdrew her hand. "I only felt a deep evil that extends through this whole house."

She raised her head as if listening and then inspected Sliobine's wrist. "Our talisman still has a residue of my original magic."

She unclasped the two silver hands holding the stone halves. "This would be simple to build on. I shall give you half as reward."

Khadra shivered. "I would rather develop my own power."

"Where shall we go?" Dorice asked.

Marea smiled. "I'm certain any of the wealthy valley families would appreciate a skilled housemaid."

"But I'm not one!" Dorice wailed. "I came to Sliobine five years ago begging for an apprenticeship. She took my gift and threatened to seal me in a jar if I didn't serve her."

Khadra felt queasy. "Like she would have me. Why didn't you tell us?"

"She wouldn't allow me to speak aloud as myself."

"How many hopeful apprentices were there?"

Dorice shrugged. "As many jars on the shelves."

They turned toward the stillroom that was a mess of broken pottery, shattered green window glass, and splintered wood. White powder was spilled on the stones and dozens of footprints led to the empty window.

"I knew they would remember," Dorice said. "I told the jars as I dusted there was a house in the glen that would accept apprentices. Don't you remember, Marea?"

"I seem to recall there was somewhere safe. An atelier?"

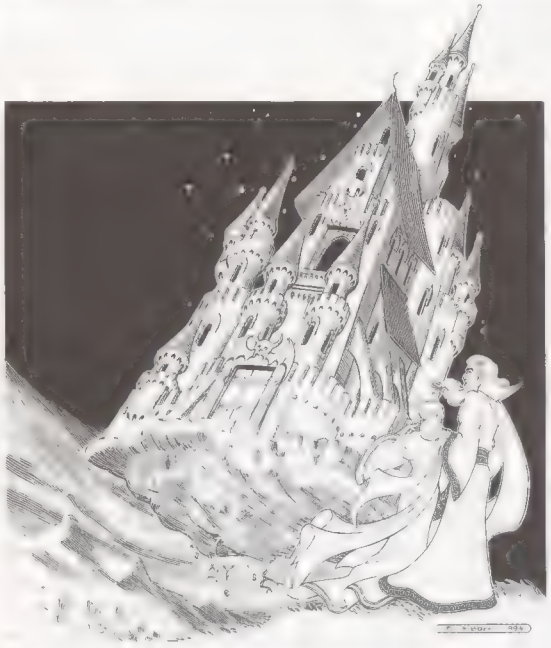
"We shall soon see." Khadra hopped onto the window ledge and then down onto the muddy ground outside.

The other two crawled through the casement and they hurried down into the valley in the fine afternoon drizzle. ❄

Beth Kitchens graduated from Georgia State University with a M.F.A. in printmaking. This is her third published story; the first was also in *Fantasy Magazine*. She also sells designs to rubber stamp companies and has illustrated and written for Society for Creative Anachronism publications. She lives near Atlanta and works at the GSU library. In addition to her writing, she also enjoys traveling, Celtic music, painting, and collecting books.

Alan Gutierrez lives in Sedona, Arizona, with his wife and daughter. He has been Artist Guest of Honor at several science fiction conventions and has appeared in these pages a number of times previously. He is a well-known cover artist.

Artwork by Alan Gutierrez



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Letters

TEMPUS *WHEN*???
Marjorie Kemp, Pflugerville, TX

Please renew my subscription and send me info re the Fantasy Worlds Festival in Berkeley Labor Day weekend '98. And — ask Rachel E. Holmen what she plans to do to get a meeting *time* into her pager messages — great idea!

We'll see you next fall!

I guess one could add the time to the pager message, preferably in 24-hour format (e.g., 1830 for 6:30 pm) for clarity. (And as an Austin Lounge Lizards fan, it's nice to hear from someone in Pflugerville.) — reh

WEB WORDS
Scott R. Novis, Tempe, AZ

I just wanted to take a moment and say thank you for all the excellent information you made available on your website. Your two articles "What is a short story?" and "Why did my story get rejected?" were fantastic. Thank you.

I'm glad you found them helpful. Of course it's the staff who handle the web pages; I don't like computers that much. — MZB

ONE MAN'S BURRO...
Walter L. Williamson, Albuquerque, NM

Thank you for taking the time to consider my story "Consuelo's Burro" for publication in *Fantasy*. I am of course disappointed that you thought the story did not have a point. It seems to be a gender thing. About half the women who read the story don't get it. Of course, that is one fo the problems with writing a short funny story. If the reader doesn't get the joke, it is rather pointless.

I also appreciate you taking the time to line edit the story. I should mention, however, that Consuelo is the feminine form of the name. There is no masculine spelling. Consuela is also a proper spelling (along with Consolacion, Consolata, and Chela), but is seldom used. Consuelo, Charo, Itsaso, Itxaro, Rio, Rocio, Rosario, and Socorro are some of the

Spanish names ending in the letter "o" that are feminine.

Well, we "got" the joke but unfortunately for you, didn't think it was funny enough to make it worth reading the whole story. Humor is very difficult to write for precisely this reason.

Thanks for the clarification on "Consuelo", and for understanding that when we offer line-editing comments on your story, it's not to punish you but to suggest places where you need to improve your skills (or where you happened to push one of Marion's or my "buttons"). — reh

CAROLS OF PRAISE
Carol Cheevers, Carrollton, TX

I enjoy your magazine tremendously. The short biographies following each story are interesting and add a little something extra to your magazine. I find myself disappointed when I read another magazine that does not include that type of information. I hate to sound trite or cliched, but please keep up the good work.

Thanks! Originally the bios were all on a single page, but I thought readers would find them more enjoyable at the end of each story. Glad you agree. — reh

AN APPALLING SUGGESTION
Cynndara Morgan, Richmond, VA

Thank you for your kind letter rejecting my story "Cats of Misandria Mari". Even if it was a form letter as you say, it did give me some idea of where I was going wrong. I am appalled, however, at the suggestion that I would submit a story to a magazine I had not read. I may still have a few more brown hairs than silver, but I do recognize that would be extremely bad taste.

I'm afraid that literary preference is so uniquely personal, that sometimes a well-meaning writer is driven to hair-pulling over mysteries that seem perfectly obvious to you as an editor. Enclosed is a new story which I think might waken that "sense of wonder" which you found lacking in the first.

At the very least, perhaps it will allow me to better understand your interests.

Cynndara, sorry if we drove you to distration. Rejection letters try to provide a rough idea of why a story was returned; it's often the case that a story fails for three or four reasons, and we just pick the most salient to mention in the letter. Still, for the recipient, it can be hard sometimes to see that a particular story didn't quite fit. Reading an issue will give some idea, but in the end, the only way to know if Marion will like a story is to send it to her. — reh

If you've read the magazine, good for you! I wish more of those who send me stories would do likewise (and that they would subscribe — I'm not in this for my health). I still get science fiction stories submitted, for instance, and while I've written plenty myself, it wasn't for these pages! — MZB

Marion Zimmer Bradley Talks to Writers:

What's Your Story About, Anyway?

Not long ago, I wrote an article saying (and really stomping on the fact) that "editors do not buy stories because they are well written." A lot of people seem unwilling to accept that "good writing" rather puts me off. That has a very logical reason. All too many beginners try to conceal — by excellent and colorful writing — that they haven't the slightest idea what their stories are *about*.

I probably should have explained that this concept has a very personal meaning to me. When I was a very young writer and was still submitting to the (now vanished) pulps, Jerome Bixby, then editing *Planet Stories*, sent one of my stories back with a terse, exasperated note.

It read in full, "Marion, f'r gosh sake stop trying to impress me with how well you write and tell me a story. And if you can't think of a plot," he went on, after a few well-chosen words about the importance of plotting which I can't quote now, "I'll give you one you can use for a whole career." And then he wrote the famous plot I have quoted so often: "JOE HAS HIS FANNY IN A BEAR TRAP" — I am convinced he said "fanny" knowing I was both young and female — "AND HIS ADVENTURES IN GETTING IT OUT."

Need you ask what I did? Being both young and female, I sat down and cried. Then I got myself a cup of tea, and reread my last few submissions in that light, thinking that he might just possibly be right. They were nothing at all but a lot of good writing; not a plot in a carload.

That's what education is, after all: it's discovering for yourself what everybody has been trying to tell you all your life.

I rewrote the story, trying to ask myself what story I was trying to tell.- who it was about and what was I trying to say.

Believe it or not, I never got another printed rejection slip. After that, the editors all seemed to accept me as a professional; if a story was off base, they told me why. But as late as when I was rewriting **MISTS OF AVALON**, the late great Judy Lynn Del Rey would ask me, "So what are you really trying to say here?" I would fumble to put it into words and she would say, "So say it. Just like that."

A word to the wise is sufficient. All I should need to say now is, "Go thou and do likewise"; but unless you're ready to hear it, people will have it keep on saying it in a dozen different ways till you are ready to hear it and do it. I just happened to be ready for it, that's all.

Hoping you are the same.

— *MZB*

Diana's Point

by

Karen J.H. Thistle

The unicorn? Oh, I killed him. I tired of that pointing horn and all it symbolized.

It used to follow me about the village, pointing, when I went to the well for water or when I went to sit in the grass of the commons, minding my own business, thinking.

When I reached the age of twenty and one, that's when he first appeared on a midsummer morning. I came out to get eggs from my chickens and he was just there, all opalescent horn and hooves and strange horseflesh.

That, of course, is when the men found out and began to speak with lowered voices around me because I had not married, not taken any of those pleasures of marriage. Twenty and one is a ripe age for a woman. If not for the unicorn, I would have been called an old-maid and been left to myself. The only worry would have been the occasional accusation of witchcraft.

Instead, they began to come round:

The blacksmith Coombs with an iron gate for my yard, all fancy filigree and floral ironwork. He would not let me pay him, not in money nor trade. (I sometimes bartered my eggs and butter, offered to read and write letters for ribbon and twine, for a length of cloth.)

Edwin the constable with a Spanish lace fan.

Tailor Tinsimmons with a fancy ball dress and a flaçon of rose-water.

There were some who wrote me songs and brought me poetry, but they weren't very good. They weren't really about me, you see, but some pale and willowy apparition with raven-silk hair and eyes the blue of summer sky.

I am not ugly, but my hair is thick, not silky at all, and I have livestock and a garden to tend. My hands are rough and I am strong. My eyes are brown.

None of them would come into the house. I offered them food, stew and bread, milk and ale. Only the smith would eat, but under the tree in the yard. For the rest, there was only one thing they seemed willing to accept from me and I was much too angry to give it.

They hadn't been interested in me before and, truth be told, I didn't think they were interested in me now.

None of the gifts spoke to who I was. Only one of them was even useful to me.

There were other eligible women in the village, younger women, and you could feel the ire of neglect coming off them in waves. The talk of witchcraft was beginning, tinged with spite and malice, and none of the fear that would have afforded me some protection.

All because of the unicorn.

I know for a fact there were others in the town it could have chosen, who would have been proud to have such an irreproachable sign of their chastity, girls whose dowries depended on the irreproachable.

I didn't care one way or the other, don't you see? Yet, there it was, as sure as if I'd had a placard on a string round my neck writ with the word. Worse, I couldn't do anything with the unicorn. It would not be chased nor spooked. I threw rocks. It would stand its ground and be hit.

The town treated the animal with all reverence or at least awe. The other young women would try to coax it to their cause with sugar and apples and carrots. The unicorn would eat what they gave it, from the hands of some. Others had to place their offerings on the ground. I offered it nothing, but its eyes wouldn't leave me.

Finally, toward autumn, I had had enough. What I wanted to do was rage upon it, dive from a thicket like a madwoman, grasp it by the horn and swipe its neck open with a good knife. Instead, I went into the woods one full-mooned night with my yew bow and shot it dead through the heart.

I told them I mistook it for a deer, that's all.

I kept the horn.

The attentions diminished and then died.

* * *

Later, I went to Coombs the blacksmith to have him fashion me a lock and a key for a box of mine.

We spoke and he folded his big arms. "Why did you?" he asked bluntly. "You hunt better than most men, so why did you?"

I told him. I told him that, after a time, a body gets tired of someone else pointing and telling everyone what she is as if it mattered, as if that one thing were all she was about.

Coombs nodded understandingly. "How is your gate?" he asked.

I told him it was a fine gate, the best of anything that the village men had given me. I told him that he was the only one who ate my food and that none of them would come into my house.

"I was hungry," he said. "And as for the other, you never bade me in."

"Didn't I?"

"No. And I said, 'Beneath the tree will do.'"

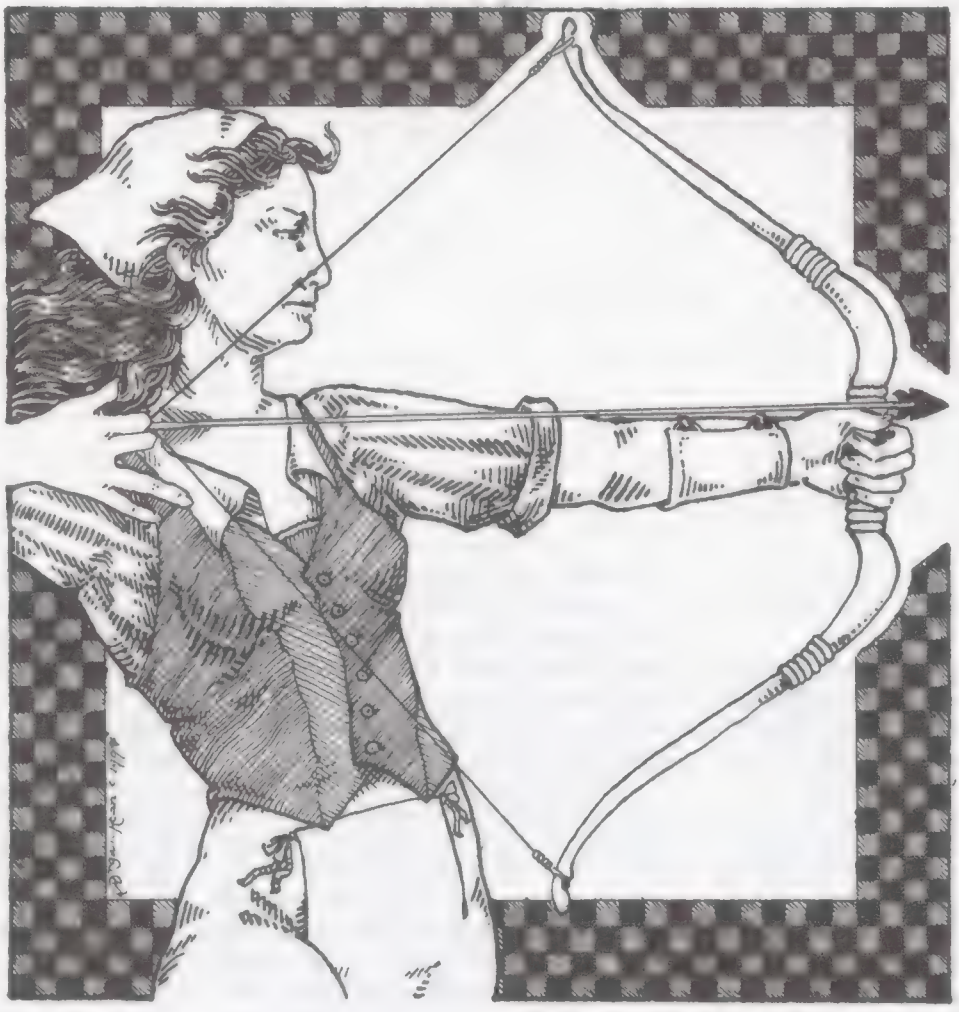
It occurred to me that the making of the gate had taken a long time. "When did you make plans to call on me?" I asked.

"Oh, last year. Then, of course, I had to decide on the gift. Then there was the planning...."

"And it was not on account of that animal?"

"No, though it did make me think that perhaps I was right. I thought you were special and so you are."

I sat down on an old saddle. "What's on your mind, Goodman Coombs?"



"Well," he said, "you seem a sensible woman. Not like some of these dressed-up chickens. We are both established. We are both...apart from the others here. I suspect neither of us, for good or ill, finds them worth talking to, especially. I would marry for good conversation."

Which made me laugh, but not at him. "But we've not said more than ten words at a time to one another and that merely to do business."

"Nevertheless, I've seen you sitting on the Commons. I've thought to myself, 'What the devil is she thinking?' What do you say, Good-woman?"

Suddenly curious about his thoughts, I said yes. We shook on it.

Our conversation, so far, has lasted twenty years.

❄

KAREN THISTLE lives in Virginia with her husband, Gene, "a good conversationalist." Her older brother and father encouraged her interest in fantasy.

MARGARET ORGAN-KEAN lives in Seattle with her husband Bruce Durocher. She has drawn Magic cards.

The Results of the Cauldron

Stories:

- 1st Place: **"Grey" by Mercedes Lackey**
- 2nd Place: **"Agent Problems" by J.G. Hemry**
- 3rd Place: **"Winterkill" by Colin Dunn**

Artwork:

- 1st Place: **Nicholas Jainschigg for "Grey"**
- 2nd Place: **Rob Alexander for "Rogue Soup"**
- 3rd Place: **Vincent Di Fate for "The Dark Queen"**

Congratulations to all the winners! To vote for your favorites in *this* issue, use the ballot on page 64.

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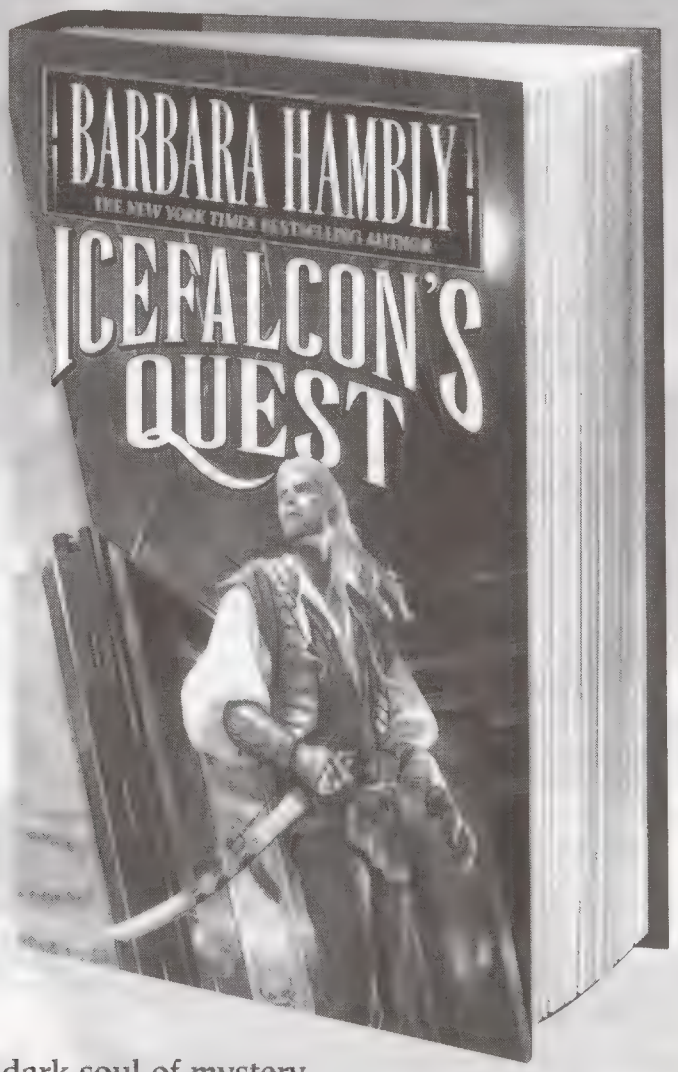

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The Last Word

The Cauldron results this time were closely clustered; fourth and fifth place choices (in fact, even the sixth choice of stories) were only a vote or two less than the third place winners. I hope this issue's choices will be equally hard to make, since I think this issue contains a dynamite group of stories and artwork. I promise that the next issue will be equally good, with a cover story from Susan Shwartz and a supporting cast of contributions by Helen Kenyon (a first-timer in these pages who wrote a story based on her life as an American living in Wales), Laura Underwood, Dorothy J. Heydt, and others.

An interesting book crossed my desk this week, a collection of Reg Bretnor stories from Story Books, 385 Hawk Rd., Medford OR 97501-8518. Bretnor was one of those authors who might defy category and genre, but he was always funny and knew how to tell a good yarn.

Margaret Davis and I are alternating this week between finishing up the issue and attending MacWorld; in one sense, this has the feel of a timewarp as we mentally move from the world of fantasy to the glitzy world of morphed graphics, computer animation software (HOTPLATE: it "correctly melts an object into a puddle"), and web servers; where the Apple Company's booth on publishing only seems to talk about DVD and CD-ROMs, not paper; but then again, this is shifting ground we walk every week as we bring our interests in medieval history et al. into the office to prepare this magazine for you. I only wish we could provide music to accompany our medievally-influenced cover, but if you have any French dance music from the 1500s among your records and CDs, put it on while you read our first story.

So far almost all of what has interested us at MacWorld falls in two categories: fonts and the internet. We're looking for more fonts to use for good-looking headlines, and along the way we've seen software that would let us make interesting modifications to fonts we already have.

"The Internet" is a broad category, so we've talked to people who write web hosting software, people whose software lets you make HTML from an existing document, people who simplify the connection process, people who can help you manage a complex site. We'd like to revise our site to make it easier to use and more beautiful.

I'm reminded that one of the first computer CDs I owned was **IF MONKS HAD MACS** from Voyager. The cover shows a monastery high on a cliff over a lake, mountains in the background. The back explains the project: "In 1987 a man with a Mac Plus started creating an electronic library of interactive essays, books, games, and art...Between word of mouth and rave reviews ('one of the most elaborate and beautiful of HyperCard endeavors' — MacUser), it became an underground legend." When you start the program, you see a picture of a courtyard and hear its fountain splashing. One part of the CD is the "monastery jukebox" — perhaps that's a source of the right medieval mood music. The jacket says that the author, Brian Thomas, was planning a Windows version, but I never heard if he finished it.

Hope 1998 is a good year for you. — *Rachel Holmen*

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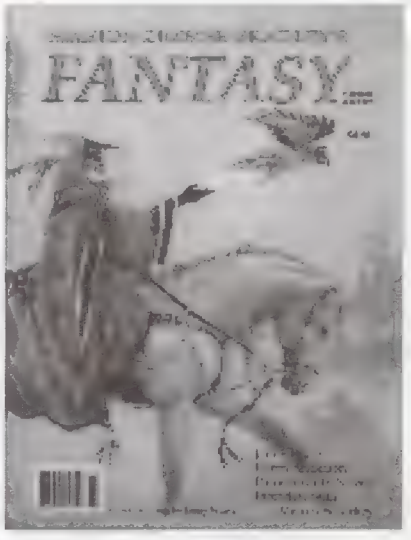

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The Cauldron — Issue #38

Story	Artist
❑ **Bisclavret** by India Edghill	❑ Margaret Davis
	❑ Omar Rayyan
❑ **A Voice In The Night** by Katherine Blake	❑ Jonathan & Lisa Hunt
❑ **Whistle The Wind** by Cynthia McQuillin	❑ Michael Kucharski
❑ **The Good Witch** by Blake Linton	❑ Barb Armata
❑ **There Is A Season** by Scott R. Parkin	❑ James Balkovek
❑ **A Scent of Magic** by John Buentello	❑ Lynne Fahnestalk
❑ **Familiar With Magic** by Beth Kitchens	❑ Alan Gutierrez
❑ **Diana's Point** by Karen Thistle	❑ Margaret Organ-Kean

Only one ballot per reader, please!!!

Vote for your favorite stories and artists, then send the ballot to:

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If you'd rather not tear out this page, a photocopy is fine, or just write your choices LEGIBLY and send us a letter. Mark 1 for first, 2 for second, etc.

Want a subscription? An order blank is on page 62. A back issue order form is on page 3; special offers on p. 23. T-shirt information is on page 56 - we have 3X's in stock!.

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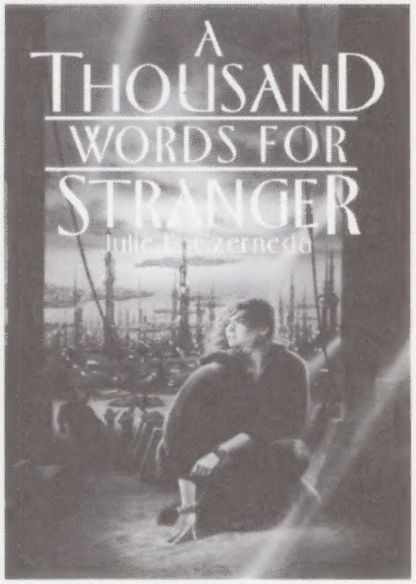

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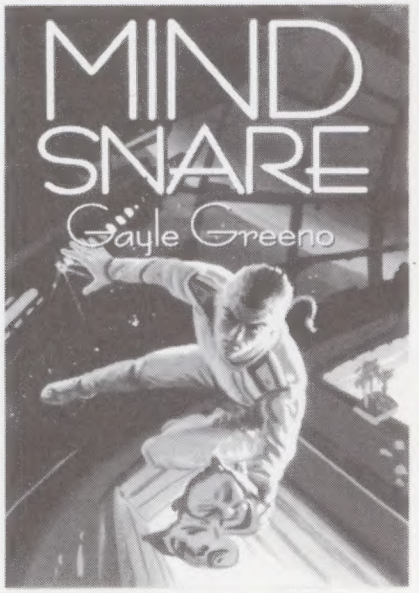

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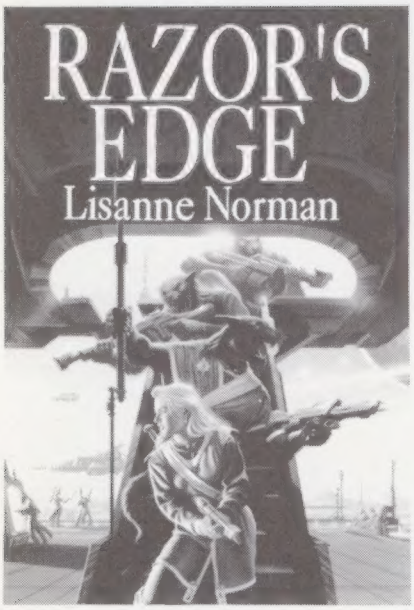

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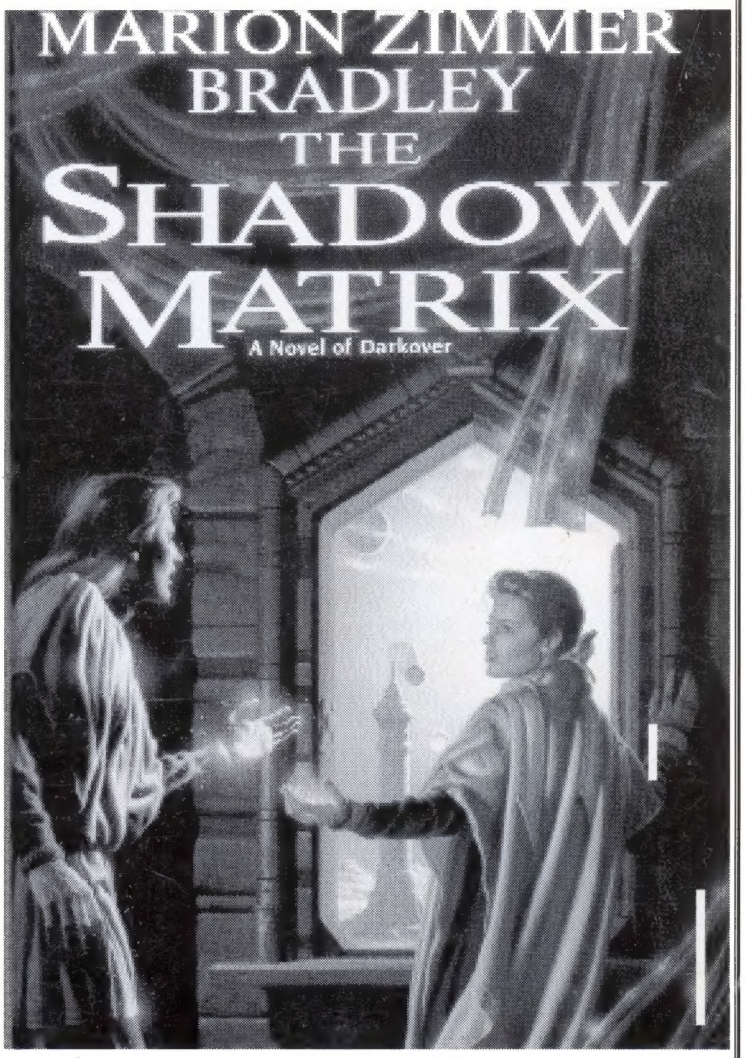

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